UNESCO The Courier
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AVERROES

Two master minds of the 12th century

MAIMONIDES

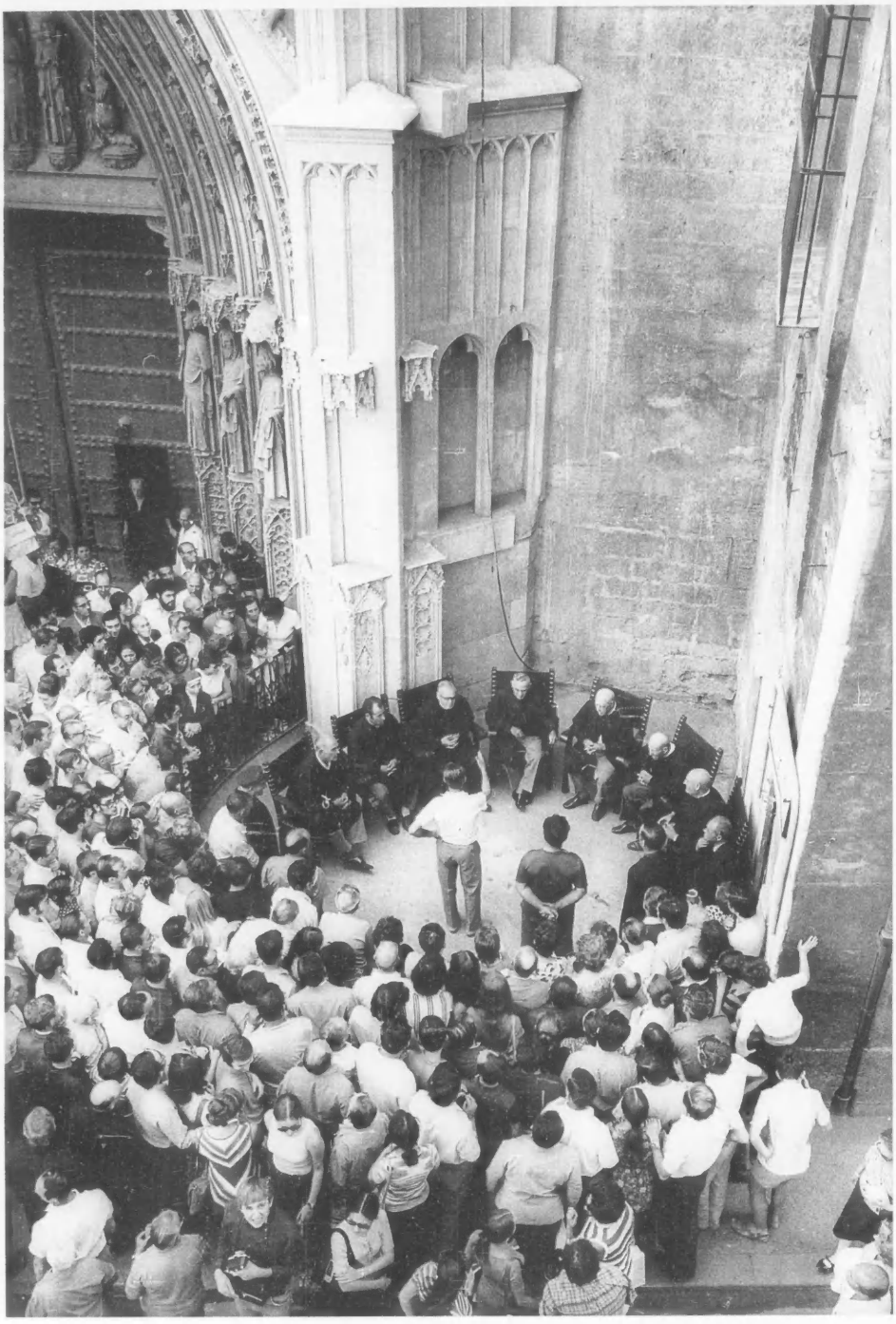

Photo Guy Le Querrec © Magnum, Paris

A time to live...

47 Spain

The water tribunal

The Huerta de Valencia, one of Europe's most productive agricultural areas, has a long history reaching back to the Arabs of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain), who introduced into it a variety of crops including the orange. Water is scarce, and its distribution, today as in the past a key to the region's prosperity, is governed by a set of ancient regulations with which all farmers who practise irrigation are bound to comply. A special court, the *Tribunal de las Aguas*, exists to make sure that the regulations are observed. It is the descendant of an institution which, according to a text by the 11th-century Andalusian historian Ibn Hayyān, performed a similar task at the time of the Cordoban caliphate. The court, the members of which represent all the towns and villages of the Huerta, meets beside the Apostles' Door in Valencia Cathedral every Thursday morning between 11 o'clock and noon. Following a simple oral procedure, it settles lawsuits and imposes fines, which are paid with the ancient currency of Valencia, the *libra*, worth 3.75 pesetas.

UNESCO
The Courier
A window open on the world

Editorial

TWELFTH-century Córdoba was the setting for a glorious chapter in the history of human culture. It saw the flowering of four centuries of the civilization of al-Andalus, Muslim Spain, which covered an area essentially that of Andalusia today. It also saw the apogee of the even older classical Arab Muslim civilization of which al-Andalus was but a part, although a distinctive part, and which extended from India to north Africa and the Iberian peninsula.

Until the beginning of the thirteenth century, Córdoba, capital of al-Andalus, was the most populous, the wealthiest and the most cultured city in Europe. Its Great Mosque, a legacy which has come down to us largely intact, provides magnificent testimony to its splendour. But the crowning glory of Córdoba and al-Andalus undoubtedly lay in the sphere of intellectual creativity. In this region of southern Europe flourished a galaxy of great minds which would influence the development of modern thought and literature: poets such as Ibn Hazm, al-Mu'tamid and Ben Quzman; mystics such as Ibn 'Arabī; thinkers such as Ibn Tufayl; geographers such as al-Idrīsī; physicians such as Avenzoar; philosophers such as Ibn Gabirol (Avicebron), Ibn Masarra, Ibn Bājja (Avempace) and, above all, Maimonides and Averroës.

Moses ben Maymūn (Maimonides in Latinized form) and Ibn Rushd (the Averroës of the Europeans) were both born in Córdoba within a few years of one another. The former Jewish, the latter Muslim, both writers in Arabic, they took the great tradition of Classical Antiquity and transmitted it, enriched and modified, to medieval Christendom. These two great Cordoban philosophers symbolize the cultural universalism of al-Andalus, a tradition which made for the fruitful co-existence of cultural traditions that sprang from the three great monotheistic religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, in a spirit of tolerance which, despite religious persecution as the period drew to an end, still stands as an example and was almost unique in its time.

This issue of the *Unesco Courier*, devoted to these two great figures of universal learning, is an attempt to throw light on a great age of intellectual achievement, the age of classical Arab Muslim thought, which deserves to be more widely known and understood. Already last December, Unesco organized an international round table to mark the 850th anniversary of Maimonides' birth. Part of the November 1986 issue of the magazine will be devoted to another major figure in this tradition: al-Ghazālī, the Algacel of the Latins. In conclusion, it should be recalled that the authors, of all shades of opinion, to whom we have given space in this issue, express their own point of view which is not necessarily that of Unesco or of the editorial staff.

Cover: above, Averroës, detail of *The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (see page 16); below, Maimonides, detail of his statue in Córdoba (see page 4).

Photo © Scala, Florence
Photo © Diodoro Urquía, Salduero, Soria, Spain. Taken from *Moisès ben Maimón "Maimónides" 1135-1204*, an audiovisual montage by Diodoro Urquía, Ministry of External Affairs, Madrid

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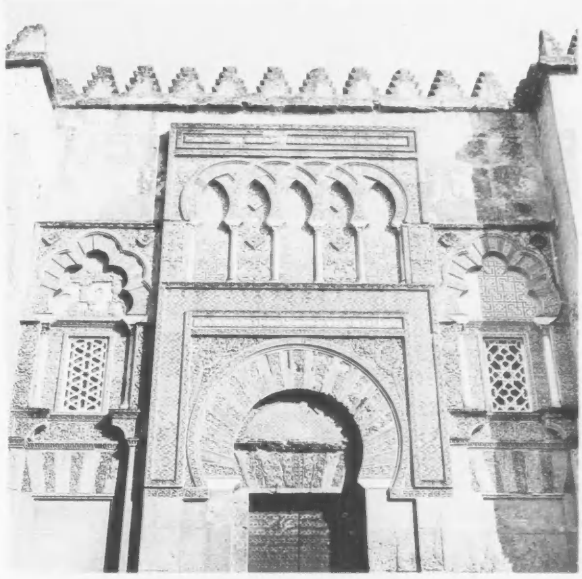

Photo © Almasy, Paris

South-west façade of the Great Mosque, Córdoba.

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Maimonides, a guide for the perplexed

by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow

***In December 1985 Unesco organized at its Paris Headquarters an international symposium to mark the 850th anniversary of the birth in Córdoba of the great Jewish thinker Moses ben Maymūn (Maimonides). We publish below salient passages from an address given on this occasion by Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, Director-General of Unesco. At another symposium held at Unesco Headquarters last December, the life and work of the Islamic philosopher al-Ghazālī (Algacel) were also commemorated. Extracts from the address given by Mr. M'Bow during the al-Ghazālī symposium will be published in the November issue of the* Unesco Courier.**

MAIMONIDES was at one and the same time one of the greatest exponents of Jewish law, one of the authorities of medieval philosophy of Greek inspiration and one of the main contributors to the extraordinary blossoming of philosophic and scientific thinking which occurred in the Arab world in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The Maimonides of *The Guide of the Perplexed* is a thinker at the height of his powers who brings together into a meaningful whole Arab science, Greek philosophy and Jewish theology. In a letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon, who in France was embarking on the Hebrew translation of his work, Maimonides wrote as follows:

"Take good care to study the works of Aristotle only with the help of his commentators—Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistus or Averroës. The writings of Aristotle's master, Plato, are parables and difficult to understand, and there is no need for recourse to them, as Aristotle's work is sufficient; nor is it necessary to concern oneself with works written by his predecessors, for his intellect represents the acme of the human intellect, with the exception of those who have received divine inspiration. ... As for logic, it is necessary to study only the works of Al-Fārābī. All his writings are excellent. ... as are those of Ibn Bājja."

It would be a mistake, however, to see in the approach adopted by Maimonides an exclusively philosophical orientation. He considered philosophy, including, be it said, the science of his time, as an essential preliminary to defining the ideal society and to pondering such fundamental questions as: Where do I come from? Where am I going? What meaning can be attributed to the order of the world? What can be known about its creation?

In Maimonides' view the elucidation of these questions should be the goal of all intellectual striving. In his own words: "... that perfection in which man can truly take pride lies in his having acquired, in a degree commensurate with his capacity, knowledge of God."

Maimonides was in fact addressing the undecided, the "perplexed" throughout the ages who are *already* virtuous in their religion and conduct, who are *already* conversant with the philosophical sciences and who are *already* inclined to exercise human reason and to apply it as widely as possible but who are nevertheless troubled in their minds, for they are unable to reconcile the

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findings of science and philosophy with the *literal meaning* of the Scriptures. The perplexed are, in sum, those who know that discursive reason cannot fully account for the mysteries of human existence and who, at the same time, do not intend to forgo the inexhaustible resources of reason.

Logic and mathematics are tools that help the human mind to exercise its faculty of demonstration. But can demonstrative discourse exhaust all our questions? Clearly not, in Maimonides' view. He did not claim, any more than did his contemporary Ibn Rushd, that faith in reason exhausts the reasons for faith, even though some theologians criticized both men for having unduly magnified the power of reason.

Concerning the limits of demonstrative science and, concomitantly, the meaning to be assigned to the interpretation of the Scriptures, one example among others throws light on the approach adopted by Maimonides. Aristotle is known to have distinguished the world of living, corruptible beings—the "sublunar world"—from the world of the heavenly spheres, actuated, so he felt, by a necessary being from time immemorial. Down the centuries, many theologians of the three revealed religions have set in opposition to this conception that of the creation of the entire world by a free act of divine will. They defied the philosophers to account for the doubts concealed by Aristotle's system. Al-Ghazālī's famous critique of the "philosophers" is an example of this attitude.

What does Maimonides say? "All that Aristotle has said regarding that which exists beneath the sphere of the moon all the way down to the centre of the earth is undoubtedly true and no one can claim otherwise, save him who has not understood. ... However, concerning that which lies above the sphere of the moon, what Aristotle has to say seems little more than conjecture."

As regards the limits of Aristotelian science—i.e., in his time, science *tout court*—Maimonides adds: "As for all that is in the heavens, man knows nothing except this small portion of mathematics. ... I would say, borrowing from poetry: 'the heavens belong to the Lord; but He has given the earth to the sons of Adam...'. As for what is beneath the heavens, he has given man the ability to know it, for it is Man's world and his abode, where he has been placed and of which he forms a part...".

Maimonides does not, however, dismiss out of hand a possible science or knowledge of the heavens. He repeats that he is perfectly willing to hear a demonstration on this subject, if any such exists. In the meantime, it is best to adopt an attitude which he describes as follows: "... To weary men's minds with what they cannot grasp, not even possessing the wherewithal to do so, would go against common sense and be a kind of madness. Let us confine ourselves to what is within our power; let us leave that which cannot be grasped by reason to him who has been visited by divine inspiration...".

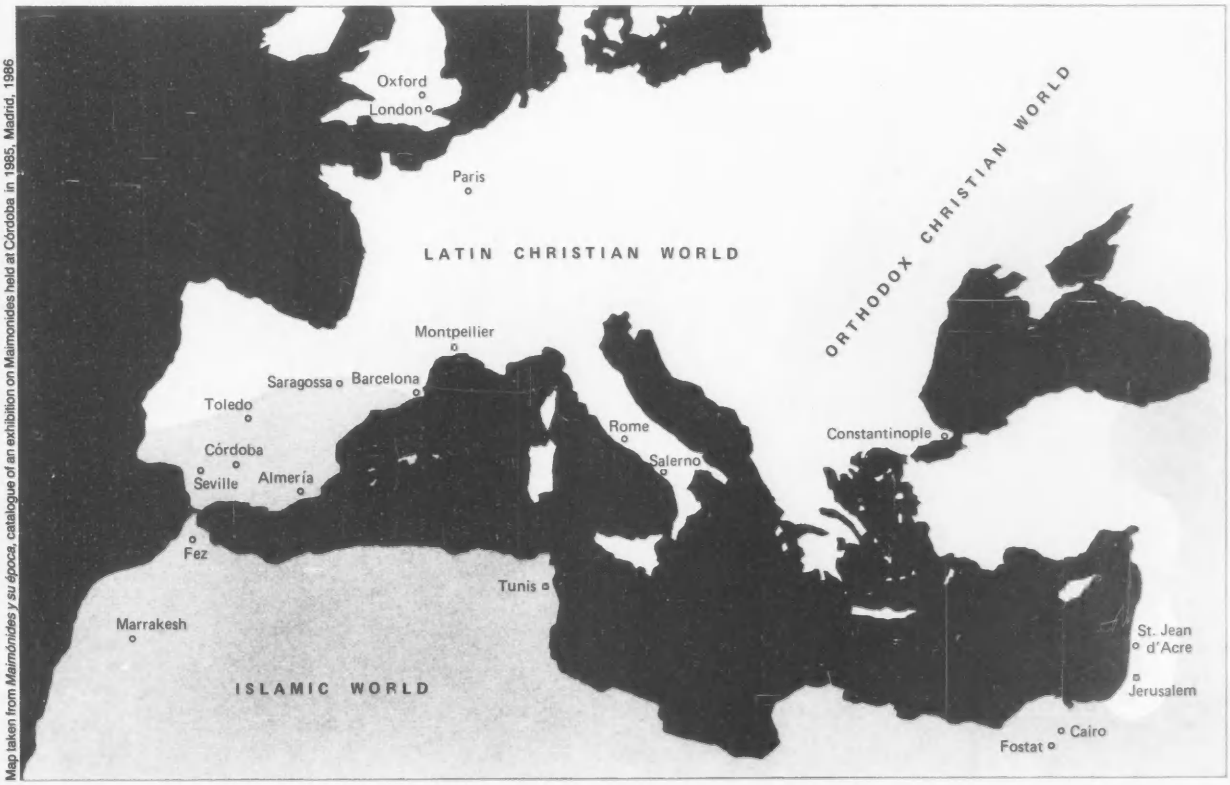
He therefore introduces certain qualifications into his interpretation of the Scriptures. When science has established a truth, there is nothing to be gained by setting it in opposition to the literal meaning of God's word; preference should be given to the allegorical meaning, the *ta'wil* of the Muslim theologians. However, the wisdom then required is even greater than that of the scientists although it should include it.

Of these men, who would need to be at one and the same time scientists, lawgivers and defenders of a religion both demanding and enlightened, Maimonides draws a poetic portrait at the end of his "Guide": "Those who have understood the demonstration of all that is demonstrable; who have achieved certainty in metaphysical matters, wherever this is possible; or who have approached certainty, there where it can only be approached; they are the ones who 'have attained the innermost abode where dwells the Lord'...".

Does not this description apply to Maimonides himself, just as much as to the most brilliant minds of the great epoch that was his? And is it not because he attained such heights that he was able to clarify the thinking and guide the faith of so many who came after him—from the researchers of Islam, to the commentators of the Mishna, from theologians of Christianity such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart to such modern philosophers as Leibniz and Spinoza? ■

Statues commemorate Maimonides and Averroës in their native city of Córdoba. Far left, bronze statue of Maimonides by Amadeo Ruiz Olmos stands on Plaza Tiberiades in the old Jewish quarter of the city. Left, white marble statue of Averroës near the city walls and the Alcázar gardens.

Below, map showing the extent of Islamic domination in the Mediterranean basin around the middle of the 11th century. Also shown are cities connected with the lives of Maimonides and Averroës.



Map taken from *Maimónides y su época*, catalogue of an exhibition on Maimonides held at Córdoba in 1985. Madrid, 1986

Averroës and Maimonides, philosophers of al-Andalus

by Miguel Cruz Hernández

CORDOBAN society experienced an authentic cultural renaissance in the twelfth century. As excavations have shown, the city had been an important settlement since the days of the Phoenicians, as in antiquity the River Guadalquivir was navigable as far as the Cordoban ford.

The extensive Roman city was remarkable for its beauty and the fame of some of its families, such as that of Seneca. But it was Islam that established Córdoba as the capital of al-Andalus—Muslim Andalusia—and as the court of the Umayyad monarchy, making it the pearl of the western Arab world and the most important, populous and wealthy city in Europe until the twelfth century.

Its fertile valley and gardens, its rich soil and the splendour of its palaces and religious buildings, despite the vicissitudes of war and other harsh strokes of fate, have survived to the present day, as has the reputation of its people, famed for their knowledge and culture.

After the great *fitna* or civil war which destroyed Córdoba at the downfall of the Umayyad monarchy, the city was reduced to the status of one more "petty kingdom" of the Banū 'Abbād, the Lords of Seville. But the Almoravids and the Almohads made it once again the capital of al-Andalus and filled it with new leading lights in art, science and literature, until its conquest by the Christians. The Crusaders, in turn, were impressed by the city's grandeur, thanks to which the Great Mosque has survived to this day.

After the Islamic conquest the three great monotheistic religions existed side by side in Córdoba: the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths. Remarkable tolerance reigned between 711 and 1085, apart from isolated incidents and the persecution of Christians in the time of 'Abd al-Rahmān II. During the Almoravid period (1085-1146) there was greater intolerance of Christians and Jews, aggravated in the former case by the support given by the Andalusian Mozarabs[1] to the *aceifa* (military expedition) led by King Alfonso VII of Castile. After the Almohad occupation, Jews and Christians were obliged to leave the territory under their sway or to pretend, as did the family of Maimonides, that they had been converted to Islam.

Cultural co-existence was a very different matter, although it worked to the advantage of the dominant social group and was limited to certain times and certain categories of people. In the ruling classes, peaceful co-existence was confined to kings, nobles and scholars; where their subjects were concerned those who lived amicably side by side were scholars, artists or craftworkers—working as architects, astronomers, ambassadors, landowners, mathematicians, doctors, philosophers, tax-collectors, translators, etc. In fact throughout the Middle Ages two major "established" cultures existed in the Iberian peninsula: the Latin-Christian and the Islamic. Judaism certainly existed also, but Judaeo-Hebraic culture was fundamentally centred on the synagogue. Far from diminishing its greatness, this represents the greatest claim to glory of the Jewish community. Having lost all real political power since their exile to Babylon, uprooted time and again from their lands, the Jewish people not only preserved the treasure of their faith and the testimony of their customs, but made a home of their countries of exile. No country seemed more like a "second homeland" to them than *Sefarad*, the name which they gave to the Iberian peninsula. But this made it incumbent on them to become integrated with the prevailing social pattern, to use the language of their rulers and to assimilate the knowledge and wisdom of other peoples—in this case, to speak and write the Arabic language and to master science and philosophy as perfectly as Maimonides did.

The importance of this great period of cultural co-existence, which later (in the second half of the twelfth century and in the thirteenth century) bequeathed its benefits to the medieval Christian world, is apparent in the work of two outstanding men of learning, both of whom were born in Córdoba and wrote in Arabic: Averroës, a Muslim, and Maimonides, a Jew. ▶

Photo © A. Munoz de Pablos, Paris

The splendour of the Umayyad caliphate of al-Andalus reached its artistic apogee in the Great Mosque (today the cathedral) of Córdoba. Begun in 786 AD by 'Abd al-Rahmān I, "the Immigrant", an Umayyad leader who escaped from 'Abbāsid Damascus and founded the emirate of Córdoba, it was enlarged and enriched over the centuries by his successors. Opposite page, general view of Córdoba with the old Jewish quarter and the Great Mosque at centre and, in foreground, the Roman bridge over the Guadalquivir. Left, typical patio in the Jewish quarter, with beyond the tower (formerly the minaret) of the Great Mosque.

Photo Georg Gerster © Rapho, Paris

1. Spanish Christians who lived under Muslim rule, while preserving their religion and ecclesiastical organization. *Editor.*

Photo Georg Gerster © Benko, Paris

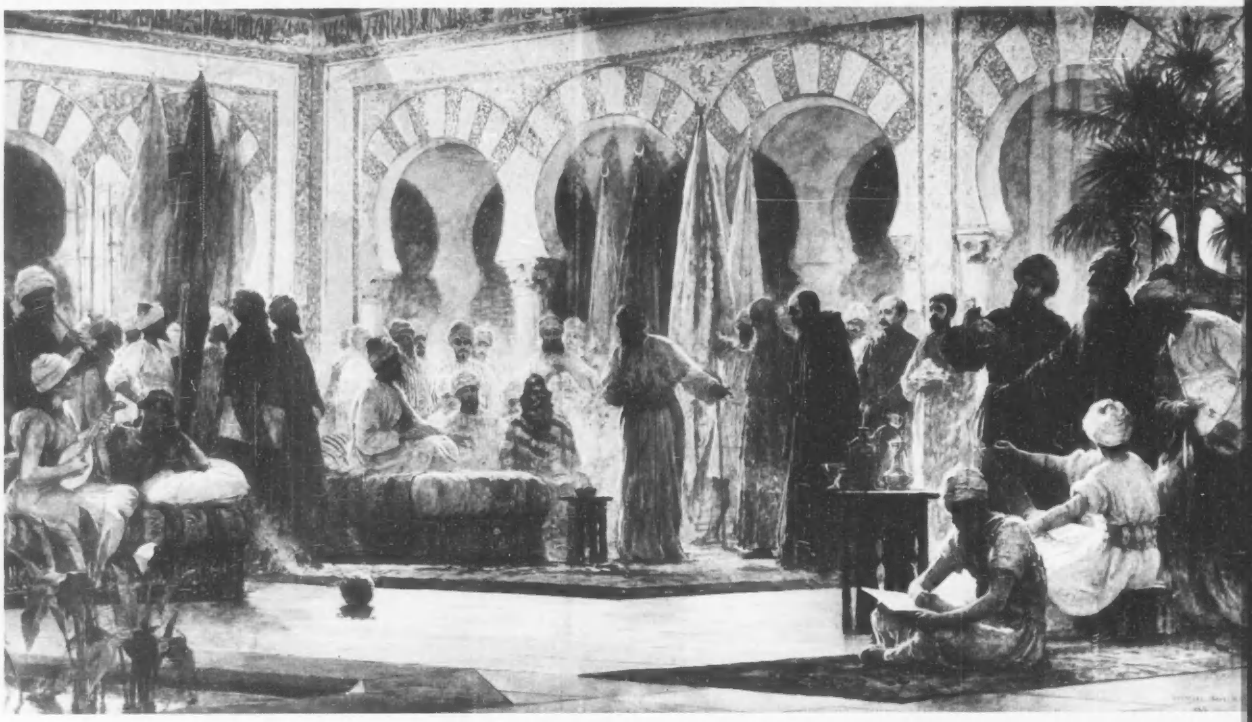


Photo © Mas, Barcelona

Centre of political power and of cultural and artistic development, the Córdoba of the Umayyad caliphate was for centuries a great focus of civilization. The caliphs took pleasure in welcoming to their court musicians, poets, architects and philosophers, who came sometimes from distant countries, such as the great Persian musician Ziryāb. Above, a painting which portrays this cultural splendour, by the Spanish artist Dionisio Baixeras (1862-1943), in the University of Barcelona.

Seville, the Roman* Hispalis, *was one of the principal urban centres of the civilization of al-Andalus. Averroës, a jurist by profession, for a long time occupied the post of qādī or judge in the city. Below, detail of the raised altarpiece of Seville cathedral, a representation in relief of the medieval city; in background can be seen the celebrated Giralda, the minaret of the vanished mosque, today the tower of the Gothic cathedral.

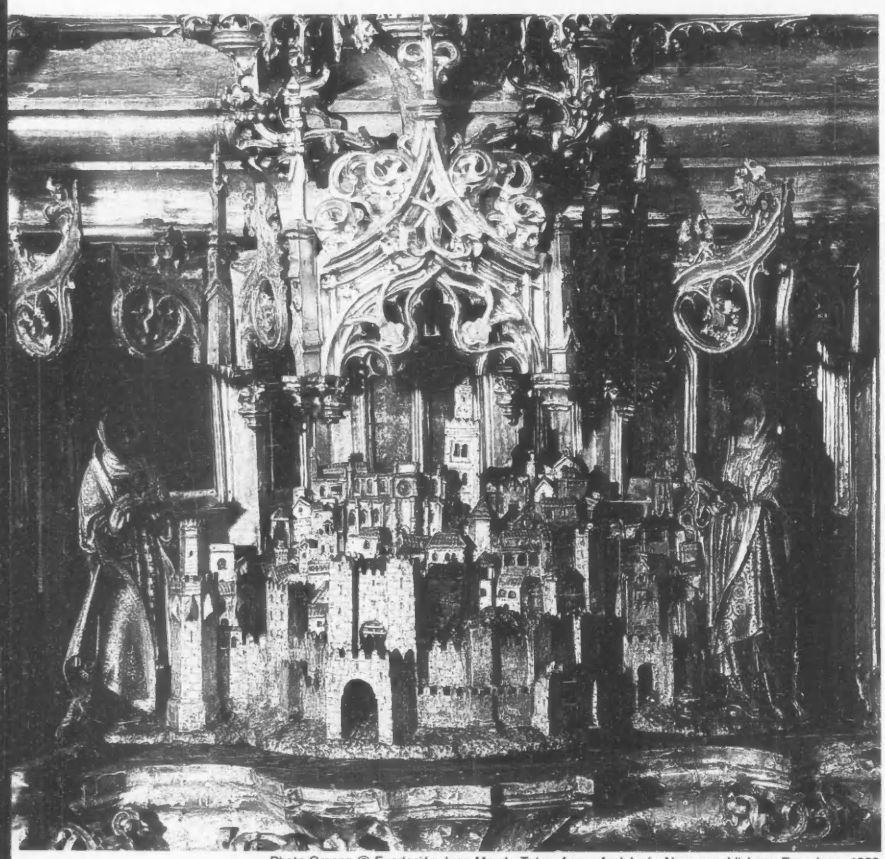


Photo Oronoz © Fundación Juan March. Taken from *Andalucía*, Noguer publishers, Barcelona, 1980

▶ *Averroës: a universal Andalusian.* The Banū Rushd family can be traced back for six or more generations. Averroës' grandfather (450-520 AH/1058-1126 AD) known as Abū l-Walīd Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Muhammad *al-ǧidd*, "the grandfather", to distinguish him from his famous grandson, was an outstanding jurist, chief *qādī (qādī al-ǧamā')* of Córdoba and adviser to the Almoravid and Almohad rulers. Thanks to his advice, the Mozarabs who lent their assistance to the Christian *aceifa* of Alfonso VII were only exiled, instead of being executed according to custom. Several of his works are still extant, including two monumental legal encyclopaedias: The *Muqaddamāt al mumahhadāt* and the *Kitāb al-Tahsīl*.

Averroës' father was called Abū l-Qāsim Ahmad Ibn Rushd (487-564 AH/1094-1168 AD) and he too was a jurist and chief *qādī* of Córdoba. He took part in the educational reform ordered by the Almohad rulers. His son, Abū l-Walīd Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Muhammad *al-hafīd*, "the grandson", to distinguish him from his grandfather, was born in Córdoba in 520 AH/1126 AD, and in due course was to become the greatest of the Islamic philosophers and the most universal of those born in the Iberian peninsula.

From a very early age Averroës studied the Arab humanities, Islamic law, medicine and philosophy. He was so industrious that, according to his biographers, he rested only twice in his lifetime: on the day of his father's death and on his own wedding day.

The *iğāza* or *licentia docendi*, the equivalent of a lecturer's diploma today, was probably awarded to him between 1141 and 1146, and he must have married between 1146 and 1153.

Towards the end of 1168, Ibn Tufayl, the author of the famous work *Risāla Hayy ibn Yaqzān* ("The Improvement of Human Reason"), introduced Averroës to the Almohad sultan Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, to whom he was vizier and personal physician. The sultan reassured Averroës concerning his dedication to philosophy and even urged him to write a commentary on Aristotle. The monarch's protection was very important, as acknowledged by Averroës in dedicating his "Commentary on Plato's Republic" to his successor. In 565 AH/1169 AD he was appointed *qādī* of Seville, where he performed his duties to the satisfaction of the Sevillians, who showed their approval by interceding on his behalf when he fell from favour. In 578 AH/1182 AD Averroës was appointed chief *qādī* of Córdoba and chief physician at the Almohad court, positions in which he was confirmed by the new sultan, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Mansūr, in 580 AH/1184 AD.

After the battle of Alarcos (18 June 1195), at which the Almohad army crushed their Christian opponents, the intolerant *alfaquíes* and *ulemas* (doctors of law and Islamic theologians) of Córdoba denounced Averroës, with the result that his works were banned and he was exiled to Lucena for some twenty months. In 595 AH/1198 AD the sultan pardoned him, restored his position at court and took him with his retinue to Marrakesh, perhaps in order to protect him from his Andalusian enemies. On Thursday 9 *safar* of the year 595 AH (10 December 1198), at the age of seventy-two, Averroës died in that Moroccan city. His body was transported three months later to Córdoba and buried in the cemetery of the Banū 'Abbād. The funeral must have been a remarkable occasion, since the great mystic Ibn 'Arabī of Murcia tells us that he was present; the mule which carried Averroës' mortal remains was laden with the corpse on one side and his books on the other as a counterweight. Thanks to an extract from the *Kullīyāt*, we are able to deduce that he died of the complications of arthritis, from which he had suffered since his youth following an attack of rheumatic fever which had not been properly treated when he was a child.

Averroës is thought to have had more than five children. We know the names of only two of them: Abū Muhammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Rushd, a doctor, philosopher and *qādī*, like his father; and Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad ibn Rushd, who died in 612 AH/1215 AD and who also held the post of *qādī*. The names of the other sons are lost, but we know that they also held the position of *qādī* in al-Andalus. Of his grandchildren we have information about only one, Abū l-'Abbās Yahyā b. Qāsim ibn Rushd, who was likewise a judge.

The writings of Averroës form an impressive corpus. As many as 127 works are attributed to him, but he cannot have written more than 84; of these 55 are still fully extant and parts of another eight have been preserved. These works constitute a complete scientific, legal, medical, philosophical and theoretical encyclopaedia. In accordance with a convention of medieval scholarship, part of these works consists of an exegesis of the body of doctrine inherited from Antiquity (the *Corpus aristotelicum* in philosophy, the *Corpus galenicum* in medicine, etc.). For this reason, the Christian Schoolmen claimed that Averroës had written three types of commentaries on Aristotle (whereas in reality they are three expositions of his philosophy), and called him "The Commentator".

Besides such expositions of Aristotle, Plato, Euclid and Galen, Averroës also wrote many works from a more personal approach, such as the *Kitāb al-Kullīyāt* ("Book of the General Principles of Medicine"); the great legal encyclopaedia *Kitāb al-Bidāya;* the famous defence of philosophy against more traditional theologians, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* ("The Incoherence of the Incoherence"), which was an attack on *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* by al-Ghazālī; and the theological works *Fasl al-Maqāl ("Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy");* and *Kashf 'an manāhij* (on the interpretation of the revealed Scriptures).

Beneath the scholastic appearance typical of the forms and method of medieval scholarship lurks the distinction between scientific and philosophical knowledge on the one hand, and theology on the other, together with the idea of human wisdom as something which can exist independently, and even the concept of an altogether secular society. It is not surprising that when Averroës' ideas were encountered by the medieval Christians they caused real intellectual turmoil, and he was branded as an atheist and a blasphemer.

At the same time, his writings on the natural world and medicine contain numerous empirical observations concerning astronomy, earthquakes, the growth of plants, the meat and wool of sheep, and even the food eaten in his time, for which he gives some recipes—for *rehogo* (a simmered meat dish), for humble fried eggs, for a dish of aubergines and for barley water, which are still typical of Spanish cooking.

Averroës' great human qualities were augmented by a strong affection for his native Córdoba, which he regarded as the most beautiful of places, and for his compatriots, whom he held to be the most intelligent people of their time. By contrast, he wrote with particular severity against tyrants of all periods, especially his own. "There is nothing worse than to be a tyrant," he repeatedly wrote, and in his social theory he gave prominence to the analysis of the well-known dialogue ▶

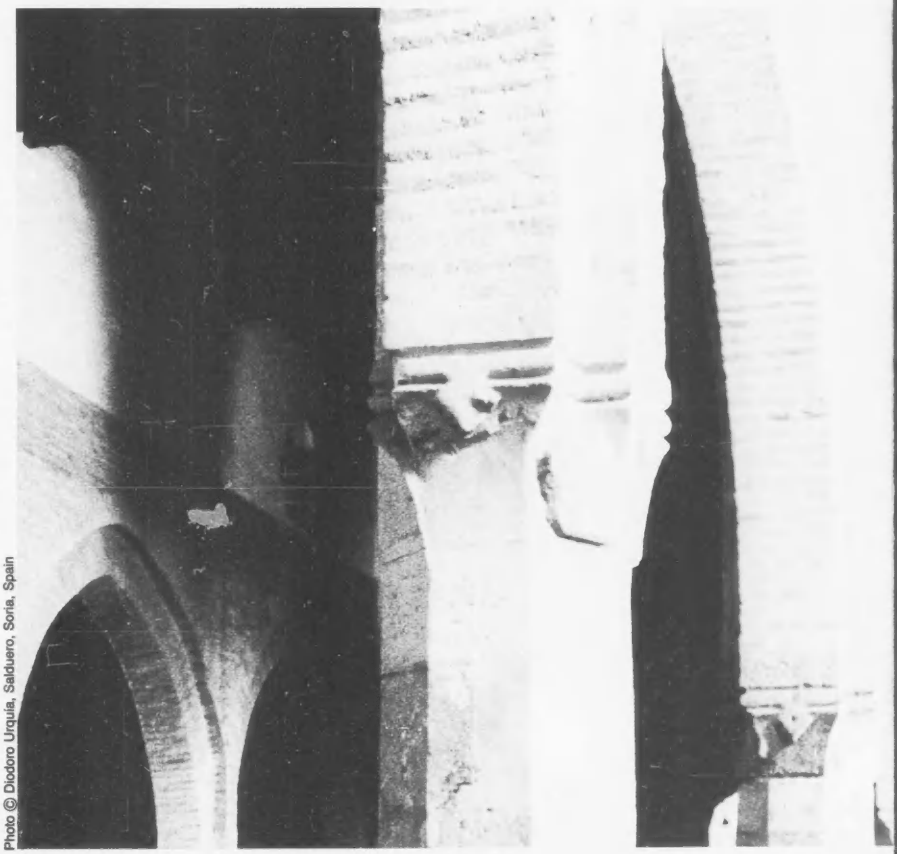
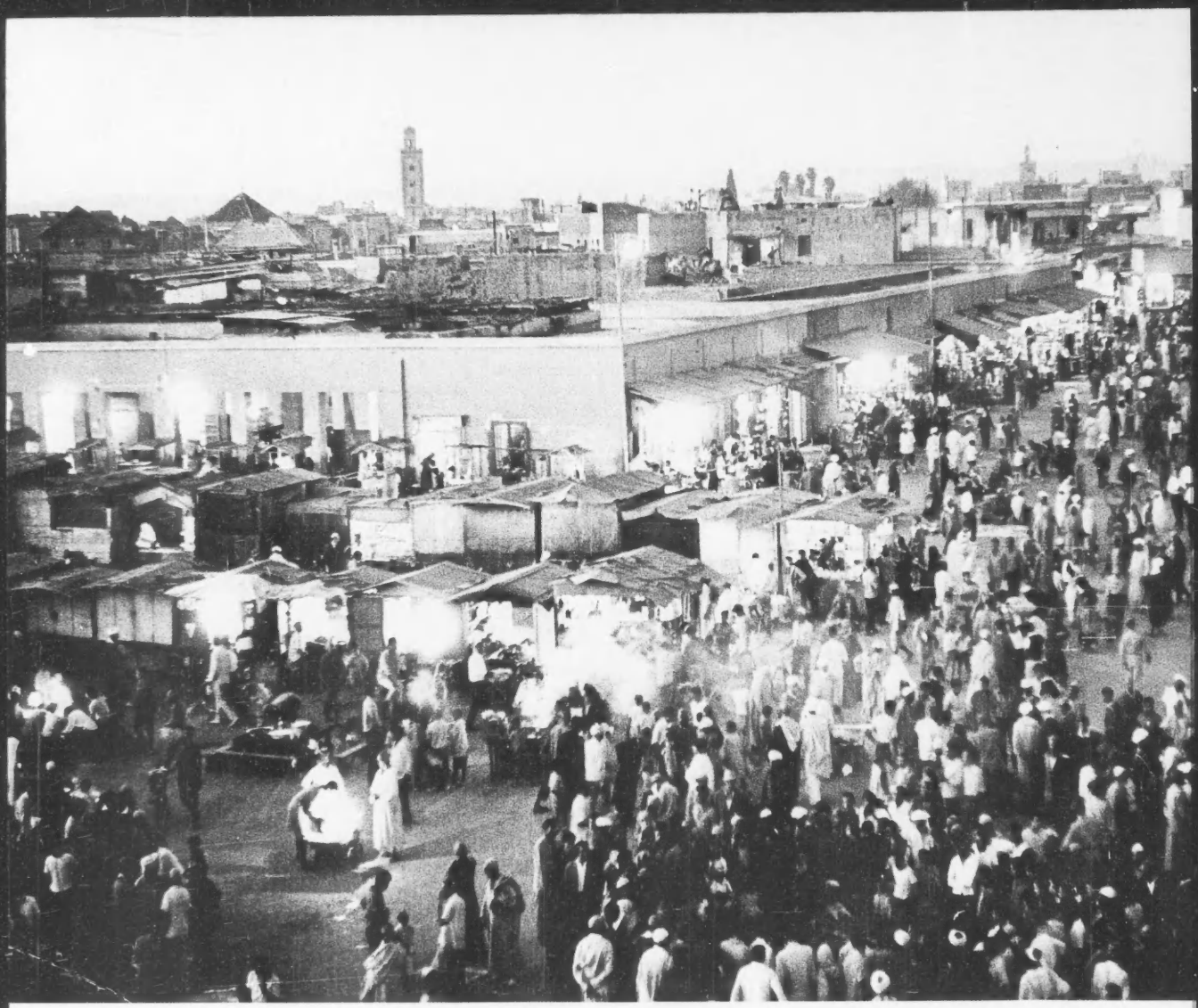


Photo © Diodoro Urquía, Salduero, Soria, Spain

Because of his unorthodox ideas, towards the end of his life Averroës was exiled to Lucena, to the south of Córdoba. The family of Maimonides also was linked with this town, with its strong Jewish roots. Right, arcades of the old synagogue, now the church of Saint James.



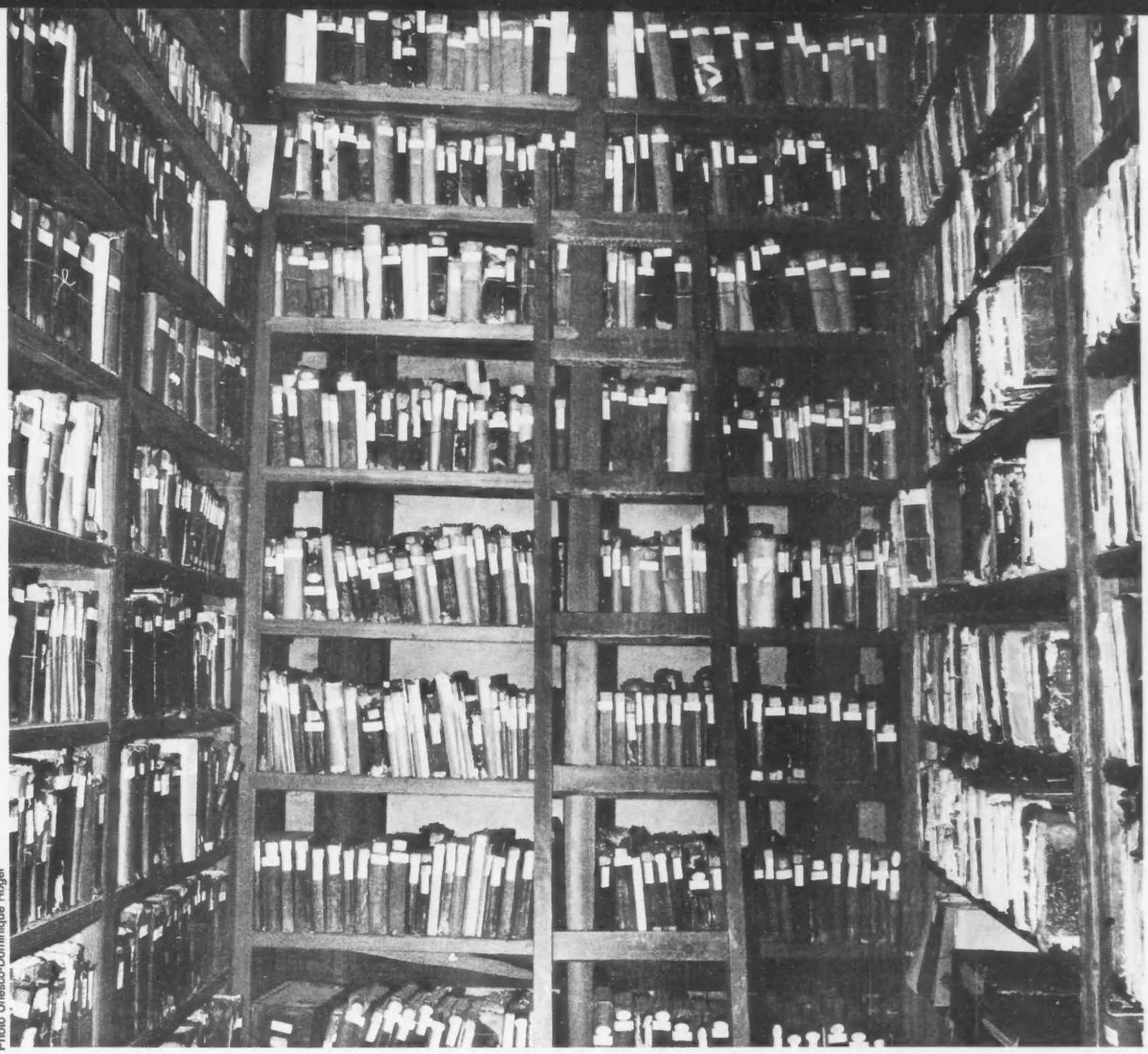
▶ between master and slave, of Platonic origin, which Hegel was to make famous. He was the first, and perhaps the only, medieval thinker to criticize the status of women in society, which "turned them into cabbages" since it was impossible for them to achieve complete personal and social fulfilment. In his model society, the necessary order would come into being freely, there would be no distinction between "mine and thine", and no-one would be treated as an outcast from the community of all human beings.

Maimonides, "the Andalusian", the universal Jew. Averroës' twenty-month exile to Lucena, a Cordoban town famous in the past for its distinguished Jewish community, gave rise to the legend that he and Maimonides knew one another. Unfortunately this was not the case. The family of Moses ben Maymūn, who was known as Maimonides and also as "Rambam" (an anagram of Rabbi Moses ben Maymūn), had long been living in Córdoba. But when Averroës arrived in Lucena, Maimonides had been living in Cairo for thirty years.

The Banū Maymūn held two unshakeable convictions: that they were descended from the line of King David and that they had Andalusian roots. They were established in Córdoba, well known and respected by the Cordoban Jewish community. Rabbi Isaac ben Maymūn, father of Maimonides, begat him in that city where, according to tradition, he was born in the siesta hour on Saturday 14 *nisán* of the year 4896 of the Jewish calendar (30 March 1135). There he received instruction in the Arab and Hebrew humanities and in the religion of Abraham and Moses. But in 542 AH/1147 AD, as the Almohad army was marching towards Córdoba, Rabbi Isaac and his family, including his two sons David and Moses, left the city and took refuge in Granada, where they lived until 1150. Their next move was to Almería, where Moses ben Maymūn continued his education. But when this city in its turn was menaced by the Almoravids, Rabbi Isaac and his family were obliged to leave it, at the beginning of 1160. They settled in Fez, where they had outwardly to dissemble (*'amûsîm*) the faith of Abraham and Moses, although in private they strictly adhered to it. In Almería and Fez, Maimonides finished his scientific, ▶

In the year 1198 AD, Averroës, his position restored at the Almohad court in Córdoba, accompanied the sultan to Marrakesh, where he died on the 10th of December that same year. His body was taken back and buried in Córdoba, his native city. Above, the Place Djemaa El-Fna and its famous market in Marrakesh.

The Moroccan city of Fez was an important stage in the long, forced wanderings of Maimonides and his family. During five years there he completed his scientific and philosophical education and began to write his books. Right, this old blocked-up window in Maimonides' family house at Fez was perhaps that of his study. Still preserved in the façade are eight of the twelve bronze bowls which embellished it in the 12th century, which were apparently used by the philosopher scientist for his solar astronomical calculations. Above right, library of the al-Qarawiyyīn mosque (859 AD), the oldest and most important in the city.



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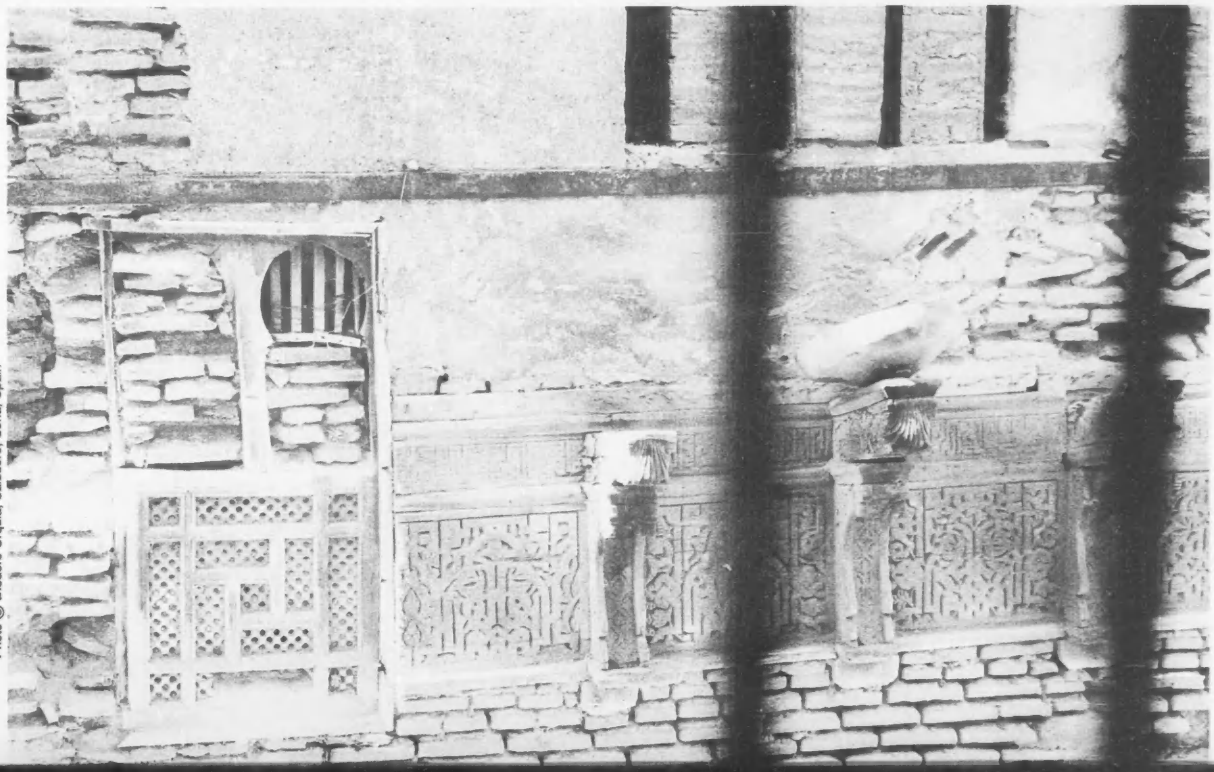

Photo © Diodoro Urquia, Salduero, Soria, Spain

philosophical and theological training, and it was in Fez that he began to write the first of his books.

Still fearing for their safety, Rabbi Isaac and his family decided to emigrate to the East, and on Saturday 4 *iyar* of the year 4927 (18 April 1165) they took ship for Palestine, reaching Akko (St. Jean d'Acre) on 3 *jiván* (16 May) after a stormy voyage during which they almost lost their lives. They spent six months in Akko, then visited Jerusalem and Hebron in order to pray in the ruins of the temple and at the tomb of the patriarchs. According to tradition, there were only four Jewish families living in Jerusalem; the city was in ruins, to which Maimonides seems to have been referring when he said that such ruination was brought about by men and their strife: "May God give me strength in everything I do and help me to keep my promises, and may that for which I prayed, there in the ruins, be granted to me, and may all Israel soon see the Holy Land restored and rescued from its decline."

The family of Rabbi Isaac left for Egypt, where they lived for a time in Alexandria. Maimonides was then thirty-one, and sorrow came to him again with the death of his father, which raised the problem of his own livelihood. Grief at his father's death was eased by the countless testimonies of respect which he received, even from lands far distant from Egypt. The problem of keeping body and soul together was solved by his younger brother David, who used the money inherited from his father to set himself up as a merchant trading in precious stones. It may have been the intransigence of the Jewish "literalists" of Alexandria which compelled Maimonides to leave that city and travel to Fostat, or Old Cairo, where he completed his great commentary on the *Mishna*, in 1168.

But misfortune again befell Maimonides with the death of his brother David, to whom he had always been very close and whom he would remember all his life, and that of his wife which occurred shortly afterwards. Thus he was faced with the problem of earning a living. Since he did not wish to be a burden on the community, he decided to support himself by working as a doctor. He communicated this plan to al-Fādil, vizier and royal secretary to the famous Saladin (Salāh al-Dīn), who appointed him Court Physician, a position which added lustre to his reputation. It may have been around this time that Maimonides married again, this time a sister of another royal secretary, al-Mātī, who himself married one of Maimonides' sisters, with whom he had a son called Ibrahim.

In 1177 Maimonides was appointed *nağğīb* (ruler) of the Jewish community, which meant personal recognition within that community but was also an honour bestowed by Saladin on the Jews, since the post had been vacant for several years owing to the irregular conduct of the last incumbent. Maimonides never allowed the Jews to call him by the title of *nağğīb*, but the Arabs, undeterred by such modesty, repeatedly mentioned his title when writing of him. In carrying out his official duties, Maimonides distinguished himself by his integrity and his liberal attitudes. Despite these heavy responsibilities and his unremitting work as a doctor, in 1180 he succeeded in completing the *Mishne Torah* ("The Torah Reviewed"), begun twelve years previously.

Maimonides' biographers describe his long working day. He would rise at first light and ride on horseback to the court, which in those days was in Cairo, several kilometres north of Fostat. He lectured on philosophy and medicine and attended to his patients at court. In the early afternoon he returned home, dealt with official matters and treated his many other patients, most of whom were poor and needy. More

In 1165 Maimonides and his family took ship at Ceuta for Palestine. After disembarking at St. Jean d'Acre, where they stayed for a time, they visited Jerusalem and other holy places of Judaism. Later they left for Egypt, settling in Fostat (Old Cairo). Here Maimonides wrote the major part of his work and held important posts, notably that of physician to Saladin and his court. Opposite below, the Ben Ezra synagogue at Fostat, near the site of Maimonides' house, where he and his family may have worshipped. This page, the Al Azhar mosque, construction of which was begun in 970 AD.

Photo © Diodoro Urquía, Salduero, Soria, Spain

than once there were so many of them, and so great was his fatigue, that he was obliged to lie down on his bed to conduct his medical consultations.

Yet it was during this period of his life (1185-1200) that he wrote the most universal and grandiose of his works, *The Guide of the Perplexed (Dalālat al-hā'irīn)*, written in Arabic as were virtually all his books and all his letters. During this period (in 1190) the writings of Averroës reached Egypt, as Maimonides himself testifies. He took the view that the Cordoban Muslim thinker "interpreted Aristotle according to an appropriate and reliable method". Nevertheless, the Arab thinkers who really influenced Maimonides were Mu'tazila, al-Fārābī and Avempace (Ibn Bājja), and possibly also the Andalusian Ibn Tufayl, in view of the parallel approach adopted by both philosophers in the introductions to their most important works.

The fame of Maimonides, both for his work and writings in the field of medicine and for his *Guide of the Perplexed*, spread throughout the Arab world and the Jewish communities. In 1195, for example, a letter arrived in Cairo from the Jewish community of Lunel, in Provence, hailing his supreme authority in rabbinics. It came at a time of affliction, for Maimonides was ill and had been the butt of accusations by the most intransigent of his critics. But letters such as this, and the high opinion of the sultan al-Afdal, Saladin's elder son and successor, brought him consolation for his mental and physical sufferings. When the scholars of Lunel received the copy of the *Guide of the Perplexed* which they had requested, they entrusted the Sephardic Jew Samuel ben Tibbon with the task of translating it into Hebrew. The task was an arduous one, but on 30 November 1204 Samuel ben Tibbon finished the translation, which in Hebrew bore the title *Môrè Nebûkhîn*. Samuel ben Tibbon had hoped to deliver the translation personally into Maimonides' hands, but during the night of 20 *tebet* of the year 4965 (13 December 1204), Moses ben Maymūn departed this life. According to his wishes, his body was taken to Tiberias (Israel), where he was buried.

The written works of Maimonides are very extensive, chief among them being the many medical writings (some of which have been published for the first time in recent years), the scientific learning of which is proof of considerable advances in the care of the sick comparable to the practices of those Averroës called the "new Andalusian doctors", in other words those of the Banū Zuhr (Latin Avenzoar) family. Also of great importance are his *Commentary on the Mishna*, the impressive *Mishne Torah*, and, above all, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, the greatest landmark in Jewish writing since the Scriptures. Soon after Maimonides' death it was being said in Jewish communities that "between Moses and Moses, there is no one to choose but Moses"; in other words, Maimonides is the *second Moses* of the Jewish people. ■

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In accordance with his wishes, the mortal remains of Maimonides were transported from Fostat to Tiberias (Israel) to be buried. Below, epitaph in English and Hebrew carved on his tomb, formerly unprotected, today covered by a small shelter.

Photo © Diodoro Urquía, Salduero, Soria, Spain

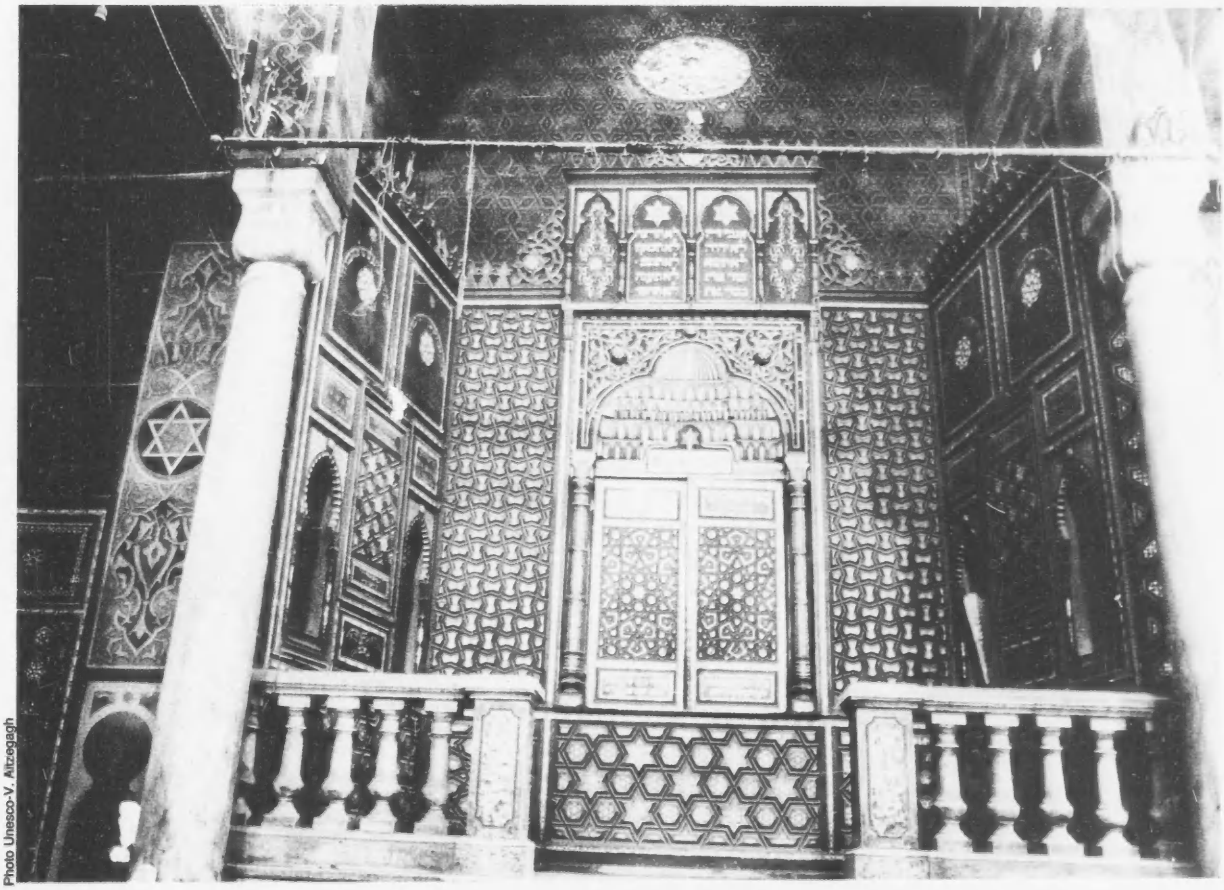

Photo Unesco-V. Altzogagh

Two mediators of medieval thought

by Mohammed Arkoun

Photo © Orientalabteilung, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Staatsbibliothek, West Berlin

Page from an Arabic manuscript of the* Great Commentary and Paraphrase on the Posterior Analytics of Aristotle *by Averroës, copied in Maghrebi script by an anonymous 13th century scribe. The manuscript is now in the State Library, West Berlin.

IBN Rushd (1126-1198) and Mūsa Ibn Maymūn(1135-1204), more commonly known in the West as Averroës and Maimonides, dominated the twelfth century by the power of their thought, the volume and the variety of their writings, their intellectual commitment to the service of their respective communities and, not least, their wide influence in the Western world.

Both were born in Córdoba, the brilliant capital of what was then Muslim Andalusia, into families of jurists (of *qādīs*, for the Muslim Averroës, of rabbis, for the Jewish Maimonides). Both lived for a time in Morocco—Averroës at Marrakesh (where he died in 1198), under the patronage of the Almohad ruler Abū Ya'qūb (1163-1184) and of his successor Ya'qūb al-Mansūr (1184-1199), and Maimonides at Fez, where he took refuge in 1160. In 1165 Maimonides was obliged to seek refuge again, this time in Cairo, where he became head of the Jewish community and physician to al-Fādil, vizier of the Sultan Saladin, and where he died in 1204, just six years after Averroës.

To be born into a family of magistrates whose task it was to apply the standards of religious law within a society totally subject to the dogmas of revealed religions, to be oneself a judge or doctor of religious law and yet at the same time to devote one's energies to the secular sciences grouped together under the name of philosophy—this was the mark of a certain society and a certain age. Confrontation between the revealed religions and the Greek philosophical tradition went back to Philo of Alexandria and the Fathers of the Church. In the Islamic context, it became more intense from the third century of the Hegira (ninth century AD). Maimonides claimed intellectual kinship with the Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī (878-950) and held the philosopher-scientist Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980-1037) in great respect, whilst expressing some reservations on his teachings. He also acknowledged his debt to Averroës who, with his critical re-examination of four centuries of Arab Muslim research, endowed the twelfth century with the most faithful expression of Aristotelian philosophy.

It is in this historical context that the work of these two mediators should be considered. I call them "mediators" because they did much to reconcile rational philosophy with revealed religion and also because they created a meta-theological language which made possible enduring communication between the three great religious communities stemming from the same initial phenomenon of revelation yet irremediably opposed and divided by mutually exclusive theological systems.

Even today, Christians and Jews are reluctant to admit an intellectual and cultural debt to classical Arab Islamic thought. Certain Jewish thinkers take this reluctance so far as failing to mention that a large number of Maimonides' works were conceived and written in Arabic. Some biographers maintain that Maimonides may even have been converted to Islam; even if such a conversion was forced, it throws some light on the possibilities of cultural communication and the differences of rites and dogma between the religious communities of the Middle Ages.

At all events, it is important to stress that the works of these two sages are concerned both with philosophy and religion. In examining Aristotle's rationalism in depth in his closely-argued commentaries, Averroës created a new intellectual climate which Maimonides, for the Jews, and St. Thomas Aquinas, for the Catholics, took advantage of to elaborate theological theories which are not wholly outdated even today.

To the Neoplatonism of the "oriental" philosophers, the dialectical weakness of the Ash'arite school[1] and the simplistic, legalistic dogmatism of the jurists, Averroës opposed the demonstrative (Analytical) method, dialectical (Topical) reasoning and persuasive (Rhetorical) argumentation, the categories of logic (*Organon*) which reflect Aristotle's philosophical practice and approach. In this attempt at the rationalization of knowledge Averroës does not seem to have been aware of the contribution of the Mu'tazilites[2]. The teachings of this important Islamic school, which, as early as the second to the fourth century of the Hegira (eighth to tenth century AD), did so much to restore confidence in rationalism, did not spread to the Muslim West (Andalusia, the Maghreb) owing to the opposition of the Malekite jurists[3]. It was these same Malekites who succeeded in obtaining the banishment of Averroës himself towards the end of his life.

The political and social position of the jurists (*fuqahās*) was an abiding factor in the history of the intellectual activity and

Photo © Bodleian Library, Oxford

Parchment manuscript page of the second part of Maimonides'* Guide of the Perplexed, *in the Hebrew translation completed by Samuel ben Tibbon, a Jew from Provence, in the lifetime of the author. Maimonides, in a letter to his coreligionist, advised him on the best way to translate. This manuscript is earlier than 1356 AD, the date when it is known that the manuscript was used as security for a loan (perhaps in the Spanish town of Huesca). The title of the work here stands out against a floral background, with an animal motif on the lower part of the page.

religious thought of the Muslim West. Strong ideological pressure had everywhere established the teachings of the Malekite school as the exclusive expression of Islam. With the fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba (1031), the break-up of Muslim Spain into petty kingdoms and the growing pressure of the Christian reconquest, the *Reconquista*, Islam fostered an ideology of combat *(jihād)* so as to mobilize its forces; this gave added importance to the role of the jurists and, even more, of the popular preachers. Thus, rather than deplore the fanaticism of the Almoravids and the Almohads, the historian would do better to examine the social and ideological context of intellectual activity in the Muslim West.

The difficulties Averroës encountered and the conversion of Maimonides, whether feigned or sincere, are indicative of the general climate of the time and also, going beyond the specific situation in Andalusia, of the tension between the "rational" or "intrusive" sciences *('aqliyya-dakhīla)* and the "religious" or "traditional" sciences *(dūnīyya-naqlīyya)* throughout Islam. The struggle between the Mu'tazilites and the Hanbalites[4] in Baghdad in the third century of the Hegira/ninth century AD reflected both a socio-cultural split and a philosophical difference regarding the faculties, the paths and the seats of knowledge.

Ghazālī[5] (1058-1111 AD) had added a speculative dimension to the argument which, nearly a century later, captured the attention of Averroës. In his *Ihyā 'Ulum al-din* ("The Revival of the Religious Sciences"), Ghazālī inveighed against the stultifying literalism of the jurists, the gnostic constructs of the esotericists *(al-Bātiniyya)* and the heretical deviations of the philosophers *(falāsifa)*—all this in the name of a spiritual religion open to rational knowledge but nevertheless with the strict limitation that the body of revealed knowledge was not susceptible to critical investigation.

Averroës chose to contest the views of Ghazālī as a means of furthering philosophically (today we would say scientifically) the crucial debate on the relationship between philosophy and religion. In his *Fasl al-maqāl fīmā bayn al sharī'a wal-hikma min al ittisāl* ("Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy") Averroës replied to Ghazālī's *Faysal al-tafriqa* ▶

Photo © Bodleian Library, Oxford

Page from a paper manuscript of Maimonides'* Mishne Torah *("The Torah Reviewed"), at the bottom of which can be read this phrase in his own hand: "Fair copy of my book made by myself, Moses, son of Rabbi Maymūn—blessed be the memory of this just man." This is the oldest known signature of Maimonides. The* Mishne Torah, *Maimonides' major rabbinical work, is a vast and detailed codification, with an Aristotelian philosophical base, of all the laws and rules characterizing post-Biblical Judaism. It is the only one of his master works that he wrote in Hebrew.

bayn al-islām wal zandaqa ("Distinction Between Islam and Impiety"); and in *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* ("The Incoherence of the Incoherence") he also refuted another work of Ghazālī entitled *Tahāfut al falāsifa* ("The Incoherence of the Philosophers"). In more general terms he exposed the weaknesses of the methodology of the theologians (the *Mutakallimūn*) in his *Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla* ("Examination of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Doctrines of Religion"), as well as writing an important treatise on the basic sources of law (*Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*).

All these works go to show how deeply Averroës wanted to remain a Muslim thinker and, with all his philosophical culture (the scientific knowledge of his age), to face up intellectually to all the problems arising from the confrontation between the Qur'anic revelation and the strictest philosophical standpoint. Latin commentators, and later the French writer Ernest Renan, distorted Averroës' thought by thinking of him only in terms of his commentaries on Aristotle. For their part, Muslims so distrusted him as a philosopher that they forgot that he was also a Muslim thinker.

Maimonides, for the Jews, and St. Thomas Aquinas, for the Christians (the Catholic Church of pre-Reformation days), adopted Averroës' intellectual scheme for the purposes of their own communities, using the same philosophical approach, the same conceptual guidelines and methodology to systematize the received corpus of revealed knowledge of their different traditions. For all three revealed religions the great problem remained the harmonization of faith and reason, the reconciliation of religious law and the essential tenets or universals of religion with Aristotle's logical processes and categories. The Torah, Canon Law and the Sharī'a, which express God's commandments as interpreted by learned experts in the Law trained in the exegesis of the Word of God, retain their supremacy. The difficulties that arise are not concerned with the norms thus deduced from the revealed word, but with the dogma on which the Law itself is based. Three essential points are at the heart of the confrontation with philosophy: the creation of the world, causality, and the destiny of the soul (immortality and the body/soul duality).

This is not the place to enter into the subtle discussions of these questions, which modern science has shifted towards new fields of research; of greater interest, it seems to me, is to examine to what extent Averroës and Maimonides were, and remain today, mediators between three communities and three historic destinies.

"In examining Aristotle's rationalism in depth in his closely-argued commentaries, Averroës created a new intellectual climate which Maimonides, for the Jews, and St. Thomas Aquinas, for the Catholics, took advantage of to elaborate their theological theories" (M. Arkoun). Mediator in the fullest sense of the word, Ibn Rushd made possible the attempt to reconcile rational philosophy and revealed faith which would characterize all Western scholasticism, in particular that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus he exerted a considerable influence on European philosophy of the Middle Ages and succeeding centuries, even though the novelty and audacity of his ideas often shocked the defenders of Christian, as well as Islamic, tradition. Below, Averroës is depicted at right in this detail of* The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas, *fresco by the 15th century Italian painter Andrea de Firenze, in the "Spanish Chapel" of the Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence. Part of this portrait of the philosopher is reproduced on the front cover of this issue.

Photo © Scala, Florence

Thought and culture as expressed in Arabic reached full flower in the sixth century of the Hegira/twelfth century AD thanks to the great works written in the East and the Muslim West from the second century of the Hegira/eighth century AD onwards. The intellectual and scientific supremacy of the Arab world of that time is confirmed by the many translations into Hebrew and Latin of studies on philosophy, medicine and the natural sciences written in Arabic by authors not all of whom were Muslims. Jews and Christians who lived in an Arab cultural setting thought and wrote in Arabic, thus enriching a body of knowledge and a range of intellectual activity that went beyond the limits set by the creeds of each of the three communities. Maimonides ranks among the greatest Jewish thinkers who conceived and wrote their works in Arabic in that area of intellectual and cultural convergence of which philosophy, as understood and practised in the Middle Ages, was largely representative.

His works were, however, very soon translated into Hebrew. As early as 1204 AD, his *Guide of the Perplexed* had been translated by Samuel ibn Tibbon, and this led the Jews to forget the cultural values and intellectual climate in which Maimonides had lived, worked and written. Today, the ideological tensions between Arabs and Israelis is such that many Jews are unwilling to take into account the great thinker's deep links with the corpus of learned writing in Arabic. Yet it was precisely the existence of these links that made even more precious Maimonides' historic role as a mediator.

The same could be said of St. Thomas Aquinas, even though he wrote all his works in Latin. His intellectual debt to Averroës in particular marks him out also as a leading light of a world of thought and human existence based on an axiological system common to that medieval intellectual milieu that I have elsewhere[6] referred to as the "Societies of the Book". I call "Societies of the Book" all those communities whose existence, order and culture are based on the phenomenon of Revelation (a unique living God, revealing himself to men at a moment in history so as to communicate to them his commandments which then become the source of the Law) and on a philosophical culture which favours the search for a rational order of things. These two great lines of approach—Revelation and scientific and philosophical rationality—imposed an educative tension on all medieval thought, whatever its particular religious attachment, in which at times religion and the "orthodox" tradition, at times reason, held sway. The whole of medieval thought bore the mark of this duality. The question remained: how could revealed knowledge be reconciled and brought into harmony with the necessary constraints of reason?

Both Averroës and Maimonides succeeded in achieving a real, personally satisfying balance which they attempted to express in elaborately thought out systems in which they integrated rational knowledge (philosophy) and religious Law, the Sharī'a with all its developments and the Torah and the whole rabbinical tradition—Maimonides' *Mishne Torah* ("The Torah Reviewed"), was a systematization of the oral Law, Mishna, and the Talmud.

Photo © Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen

Another page from a parchment manuscript of Samuel ben Tibbon's Hebrew translation of the* Guide of the Perplexed. *It was copied in Barcelona in 1348 AD by Leví ben Ishaq Fijo Caro (son of Caro), of Salamanca, for the physician R. Menahem Besalel, and illuminated shortly afterwards in the Catalan Gothic style, probably by a Christian artist. The miniature shows an astronomer with an astrolabe in his hands speaking to his pupils. According to one specialist, it depicts Aristotle explaining the creation of the world.

Rationalist commentators on the two thinkers have attempted to claim them both as supporters of "pure" reason and a philosophy which, if not entirely secular, was at least distinct from religious ideas. However, the functions they fulfilled as judges in their respective religious communities have to be disregarded and their writings concerning the "religious sciences" of their time have to be ignored, if they are to be considered as "philosophers in disguise".

Like all the sages of his time, Maimonides had a lofty view of his responsibility as an intellectual capable of explaining to the faithful the teachings of religious Law whilst taking into account the fact that men had not all attained the same level of learning. In Book III of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, with the aid of a rich parable, he explains clearly the various stages and levels in any true search for God. I quote this entire passage, since it has not been contradicted by Muslim thinkers and because it affords an example of that climate of intellectual, spiritual and cultural convergence in which the brightest Jewish, Christian and Muslim minds were active under the double impulsion of Revelation and a philosophical culture.

"I will begin the subject of this chapter with a simile. A king is in his palace, and all his subjects are partly in the country, and ▶

CONTINUED PAGE 20

MAIMONIDES

Maimonides tells how he spends his working day at Cairo

I live at Fostat whereas the king resides in Cairo; the two towns are two sabbatical days apart [each equivalent to a league]. My obligations towards the king are very time consuming. I must pay him a visit each morning; when he is not well, or if his children and his wives fall ill, I dare not normally go far from Cairo, being constrained to stay at the palace almost all day. It is also usual for me to have to look after one or another of his officials. Thus, I go to Cairo every day at dawn and do not return to Fostat, even if something unexpected does not arise which forces me to stay in Cairo, until the early hours of the afternoon at best, racked by hunger.

I find the waiting rooms of my home full of people: Jews and Gentiles, dignitaries and ordinary people, judges and officials, friends and enemies, a whole multitude who are impatiently waiting for me. I get down from my mount, wash my hands and go into the antechamber, praying to God that they will not be impatient while I quickly take a light refreshment: the sole meal worthy of the name which I have throughout the day. Then I receive them, I write prescriptions and advise them on the treatment corresponding to their ailments, and the people do not cease coming in and going out of the house until dusk, indeed until two hours after nightfall, I swear on the Law, and it may be that I have eaten or drunk nothing. When it is pitch dark, I am so weary that I go to bed without even having been able to say goodnight.

Only on Saturdays can I speak in private with a Jew, or meditate alone. Then, the whole community or at least a substantial number of its members, gathers in my house after the morning religious service; so I advise them on the best thing to do the following week, and we meditate together for a while until noon, the hour at which they leave. Some of them come back [in the afternoon] to study with me until the evening prayer. Thus I pass my days.

Letter to Samuel ben Tibbon, September 1199

Photo © Diodoro Urquia, Salduero, Soria, Spain

Man is naturally a social being

It has already been fully explained that man is naturally a social being, that by virtue of his nature he seeks to form communities; man is therefore different from other living beings that are not compelled to combine into communities. He is, as you know, the highest form in the creation, and he therefore includes the largest number of constituent elements; this is the reason why the human race contains such a great variety of individuals, that we cannot discover two persons exactly alike in any moral quality, or in external appearance. The cause of this is the variety in man's temperament ... Such a variety among the individuals of a class does not exist in any other class of living beings; for the variety in any other species is limited; only man forms an exception; two persons may be so different from each other in every respect that they appear to belong to two different classes. ... This great variety and the necessity of social life are essential elements in man's nature. But the well-being of society demands that there should be a leader able to regulate the actions of man.

The Guide for the Perplexed, translated by M. Friedländer, Dover Publications, New York, 1956, Part II, Chapter XL, pp. 232-3

Ignorance is the cause of all evils

All the great evils which men cause to each other because of certain intentions, desires, opinions, or religious principles, are likewise due to non-existence, because they originate in ignorance, which is absence of wisdom. ... In the same manner various classes of men, each man in proportion to his ignorance, bring great evils upon themselves and upon other individual members of the species. If men possessed wisdom ... they would not cause any injury to themselves or to others.

The Guide for the Perplexed, idem, Part III, Chapter XL, p. 267

Intellectual perfection is the highest level of true human perfection

The ancient and the modern philosophers have shown that man can acquire four kinds of perfection. The first kind, the lowest, in the acquisition of which people spend their days, is perfection as regards property; the possession of money, garments, furniture, servants, land and the like; ... The second kind is more closely related to man's body than the first. It includes the perfection of the shape, constitution and form of man's body; ... The third kind of perfection is more closely connected with man himself than the second perfection. It includes moral perfection, the highest degree of excellency in man's character. ... The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man; the possession of the highest intellectual faculties ... With this perfection man has obtained his final object; it gives him true human perfection; it remains to him alone; it gives him immortality, and on its account he is called man.

The Guide for the Perplexed, idem, Part III, Chapter LIV, pp; 394-5

The difficulties encountered in writing "The Commentary on the Mishna"

I have finished this work in accordance with what I promised [when I began it], praying fervently to the All-Powerful that he should preserve me from error. But if anyone were to discover some error in this commentary or to know of some better explanation, I will readily accept them, and my only excuse will be that I have done my best to apply myself much more than someone who writes expecting a reward or who is moved by self-interest. I have worked in very difficult conditions, as heaven desired that I live in exile and wandering from place to place; thus I have been obliged to do this work while I was travelling on land or sea. Suffice it to recall that during all this period other tasks also occupied my time, but I prefer the former explanation, in order to stimulate those who wish to criticize or gloss over this commentary, and supply at the same time [the reason] for the long process of compiling this work. I, Moses ben Maymūn, began this work when I was twenty-three years old, and I have finished it in Egypt at the age of thirty-three, in the year 1479 of the Seleucid era (1168 AD).

The Commentary on the Mishna

A miniature anthology

AVERROES

Photo © Scala, Florence

On the condition of women in medieval Islamic society

And we say that women, in so far as they are of one kind with men, necessarily share in the end of man. They will differ only in less or more ... If the nature of men and women is of one kind, and the [nature] that is of one kind [turns] to only one activity in the city, then it is evident that the women in this city will practice the [same] activities as the men ... Similarly, too, since some women are formed with eminence and a praiseworthy disposition, it is not impossible that there be philosophers and rulers among them. ... The competence of women is unknown, however, in these cities since they are only taken [in them] for procreation and hence are placed at the service of their husbands and confined to procreation, upbringing, and suckling. Since women in these cities are not prepared with respect to any of the human virtues, they frequently resemble plants in these cities. Their being a burden upon the men [in these cities] is one of the causes of the poverty of these cities. This is because they are to be found there in double the number of men, while not understanding through [their] upbringing any of the necessary actions except for the few actions—like the art of spinning and weaving—that they undertake mostly at a time when they have need of them to make up for their lack of spending [power].

Averroës on Plato's "Republic", translated by Ralph Lerner © Cornell University Press, New York, 1974. *The First Treatise*, pp. 57-9

Necessity for social cohesion

Now there is no greater evil in the governance of the city than that governance which converts a single city into many cities, just as there is no greater good in cities than that which joins them together and makes them one. This being so, it is clear that community in advantages and damages will lead them to be bound to the city and befriend it. ... That is why it is said that people's being near other people is advantageous. In general, there is nothing more productive of evil and confusion to the city than its citizens saying of some particular thing: "This is mine and this is not mine."

Averroës on Plato's "Republic", idem *The First Treatise*, p. 64

The psychology of sight

Sight has the property of capturing the colours of material reality, and so it must adapt itself adequately to matter. Thanks to this adequation, it can be abstracted by cogitation and understanding. ... The sense of sight [also] receives the forms of objects in the following manner: first, the air receives the [sensible] forms by means of light, conducting them straight to the tissue; then, the common sense receives the forms of the objects. The tissue contains the vitreous humour, which resembles a mirror the nature of which is between air and water, thanks to which it can capture the image from the air, which functions [also] as a mirror, and transmits it to the aqueous humour which, through its very condition, can communicate with the two natures. ... From this the common sense receives the forms which it transmits to the imaginative faculty where their reception, totally dematerialized, takes place. And so it is said that the received form shows three degrees: the first is the sensible [in the eye], the second is dematerialized in the common sense, and the third is immaterial in the imaginative faculty. From these degrees, one then passes to others, more elevated and more noble [in the memory and in the understanding].

Book of the General Principles of Medicine

The prime mover is devoid of movement and eternal

If a prime mover exists, which precedes all movements, whether temporally or essentially, then that movement will take place either in a generable and corruptible moving body, or in an eternal moving body. Thus [Aristotle] says that if it were a generable moving body, it would not be the prime mover, either by nature or temporally, because it cannot be asserted that the prime mover is a form generated in a moving body.

Treatise on Physics

The most elevated knowledge alone brings happiness

Just as hunger and thirst are an emptying of the body and an emptiness that befalls it, so are ignorance and absence of knowledge an emptying of the soul and an emptiness for it. This being so, there are two people who are filled—i.e., he who takes food and he who acquires knowledge. But the true fullness is only through the thing that has the noblest existence. ... Now if, in general, fullness in what one apprehends is pleasant, whatever [he apprehends of what] is essentially nobler and [participates] more in truth and is more enduring, is necessarily a more choiceworthy pleasure. Such is the case of the pleasure of the intellect relative to the other pleasures.

Averroës on Plato's "Republic", idem *The Third Treatise*, pp. 146-7

The virtues of the use of olive oil

When it is derived from ripe and healthy olives and if its properties have not been adulterated in an artificial manner, the oil can be assimilated [perfectly] by the human organism. ... Foodstuffs seasoned with the oil are nourishing, so long as the oil is fresh and not very acidic. ... Generally, the entire substance of the oil agrees with man, and so at home [in al-Andalus] meat is seasoned only with this oil, because it is the best way to prepare it, while cooking it slowly. This is how it is done: place the meat in a casserole into which some oil has been poured, then add water and heat it on a low flame, without allowing it to boil.

Book of the General Principles of Medicine

The base condition of the tyrant

This is necessarily the situation of the tyrant: he is detained among a class such as this, filled with hunger and fear. Moreover, he has great hunger [within] himself and cannot rule himself. Hence he cannot go wherever he wishes nor look at whatever he wishes. ... One of the worst dispositions of such an individual is that he is unable to restrain and overcome himself, yet he attempts to lead other people at some level. ... The tyrant is the most enslaved of people and has no device by which to put an end to his desires, but rather is forever in continual sorrow and mourning. The soul of one who is of this description is an impoverished soul; hence he is envious, violent and friendless. ... Without any doubt, he is of necessity troubled and unlucky.

Averroës on Plato's "Republic", idem *The Third Treatise*, pp. 142-3

הלכות יסודי התורה
רבי משה בן מימוני
CONSTITVTIONES
DE
FVNDAMENTIS
LEGIS
RABBI MOSIS F. MAIMON.
Latinè redditæ per
GVILIELMVM VORSTIVM C. F.
Additis quibusdam notulis, & Abravanelis
scripto, de Fidei Capite.
INDEFESSVS AGENDO
AMSTELODAMI,
Apud GVILIELM. & IOHANNEM BLAEV.
CIↃ IↃ C XXXVIII.

Photo © Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid

Title page of a Latin translation of the* Foundations of the Law *(first section of the fourth book of the* Mishne Torah*), published in Amsterdam in 1638.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

partly abroad. Of the former, some have their backs turned towards the king's palace, and their faces in another direction; and some are desirous and zealous to go to the palace, seeking 'to inquire in his temple', and to minister before him, but have not yet seen even the face of the wall of the house. Of those that desire to go to the palace, some reach it, and go round about in search of the entrance gate; others have passed through the gate, and walk about in the ante-chamber; and others have succeeded in entering into the inner part of the palace, and being in the same room with the king in the royal palace. But even the latter do not immediately on entering the palace see the king, or speak to him; for, after having entered the inner part of the palace, another effort is required before they can stand before the king—at a distance or close by—hear his words or speak to him. I will now explain the simile which I have made. The people who are abroad are all those that have no religion, neither one based on speculation nor one received by tradition. Such are the extreme Turks that wander about in the north, the Kushites who live in the south, and those in our country who are like these. I consider these as irrational beings and not as human beings; they are below mankind, but above monkeys, since they have the form and shape of man, and a mental faculty above that of the monkey.

"Those who are in the country, but have their backs turned towards the king's palace, are those who possess religion, belief, and thought, but happen to hold false doctrines, which they either adopted in consequence of great mistakes made in their own speculations, or received from others who misled them. Because of these doctrines they recede more and more from the royal palace the more they seem to proceed. These are worse than the first class, and under certain circumstances it may become necessary to slay them, and to extirpate their doctrines, in order that others should not be misled.

"Those who desire to arrive at the palace, and to enter it, but have never yet seen it, are the mass of religious people; the multitude that observe the divine commandments, but are ignorant. Those who arrive at the palace, but go round about it, are those who devote themselves exclusively to the study of the practical law; they believe traditionally in true principles of faith, and learn the practical worship of God, but are not trained in philosophical treatment of the principles of the Law; and do not endeavour to establish the truth of their faith by proof. Those who undertake to investigate the principles of religion, have come into the ante-chamber; and there is no doubt that these can also be divided into different grades. But those who have succeeded in finding a proof for everything that can be proved, who have a true knowledge of God, so far as a true knowledge can be attained, and are near the truth, wherever an approach to the truth is possible, they have reached the goal, and are in the palace in which the king lives.

"My son, so long as you are engaged in studying the Mathematical Sciences and Logic, you belong to those who go round about the palace in search of the gate. Thus our Sages figuratively use the phrase: 'Benzoma is still outside'. When you understand Physics, you have entered the hall; and when, after completing the study of Natural Philosophy, you master Metaphysics, you have entered the innermost court, and are with the king in the same palace. You have attained the degree of the wise men, who include men of different grades of perfection." (*The Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 51)

Averroës was even more insistent than Maimonides on the importance of not revealing "philosophical interpretations to those who are not able to comprehend them". This was not because he had an aristocratic or elitist attitude towards philosophy or because he wanted to protect his reputation as a good Muslim; the fact is that he shared with other experts of the Law—Ghazālī held the same view with regard to *Kalām* (Muslim scholastic theology)—the specifically religious conviction that great caution should be exercised by teachers so as not "to lead the faithful away from the divine Law", following in this the example of "the divine legislator [who] cares for the well-being of the soul as a doctor cares for the health of the body".

It is true that Maimonides was much better received and respected within his community than Averroës ever was by the Muslims. This is no doubt due to the fact that Maimonides compiled "guides" to the orthodox faith to help the faithful avoid perdition and the loss of eternal salvation. Thus, in his "Commentary on the Mishna", he summarized the thirteen articles of faith which every Jew must accept and which have been used, in verse form, since the fourteenth century in the daily ritual of Sephardic communities. Religious communities, especially when they are minorities, need the cohesion provided by beliefs and rituals that are valid for all and act as a "safety net" for believers. Maimonides was well aware of this need, whereas it was not so vital a matter of concern for Averroës who was a member of a broader and more dominant *Umma* (community), especially during the time of the Almohads.

At all events, the century of Averroës and Maimonides, succeeded shortly by that of St. Thomas Aquinas, is worthy of study with a view to a reassessment of medieval thought which goes beyond the claims of supremacy of militant theologies or a history of philosophy deprived of its medieval dimension, such as the secularized, positivist, anti-clerical West has long imposed.

In university courses as conceived and followed in the West, Arab philosophy is generally left to departments of Oriental studies which themselves are considered of only marginal importance within the universities. If this state of affairs is to be rectified, a scientific revision must be undertaken of the overall history of the cultural climate of the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages, involving philosophy, theology and the history of the sciences. This is the lesson that emerges from the works of the two great mediators whom I have all too briefly presented here. ■

1. The *Ash'arite* school: Followers of the Muslim theologian al-Ash'ari (873-935 AD) who reconciled a dialectic method with orthodox beliefs to create a new form of scholasticism in Islam. *Editor.*
2. The *Mu'tazilites*: A Muslim philosophical school founded in the eighth century AD emphasizing reason in religious interpretation, free will in opposition to predestination and the unity and justice of Allah. *Editor.*
3. The *Malekites*: One of the four *Sunni* schools of law founded in the eighth century AD. The Malekites preferred traditional opinions and analogical reasoning to a strict reliance on Hadīth (traditions concerning the Prophet's life and utterances) as a basis for legal judgement. *Editor.*
4. The *Hanbalites*: School of religious law relying solely on a literal reading of the Qur'an and Hadīth in formulating legal decisions. *Editor.*
5. Part of the November 1986 issue of the *Unesco Courier* will be devoted to this great Islamic thinker.
6. *Pour une critique de la raison islamique*, Maisonneuve-Larose, 1984, and *Lectures du Coran*, 1982.

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A voice that speaks across the centuries

by Shalom Rosenberg

EIGHT hundred and fifty years after his birth, Maimonides is still in some ways an enigmatic figure, and research into his writings is a detective story that passionately divides scholars and scientists.

There are various reasons for this, some of them subjective. In the Jewish tradition, for example, Maimonides has become a "Rorschach ink blot" onto which people project their ideals, and sometimes—though very seldom—their enmity.

On the one hand, Maimonides' profound and encyclopaedic knowledge, the depth and scope of his writings, have made him a central authority for experts in many different fields. On the other hand, his personal integrity and dedication, his commitment to the future of his people, have given him a great significance to large numbers of men and women, not only as a focus of identification but as a caring teacher. He has certainly become, as the name of his main philosophical work implies, the "Guide", but not only of the perplexed. Indeed, everyone who has studied his works has interpreted them in his own image and according to his own level of understanding.

This subjective picture is, however, only a partial representation of the whole truth. Great controversy, between even the most dispassionate modern scholars, is caused by the fact that Maimonides wrote in a special way. He saw himself continuing the Biblical and Talmudic tradition of writing on two levels. The Bible and the Ṭalmud are, according to him, books written for the masses, yet they have an inner level that speaks to the philosophers and those who have advanced beyond the masses.

The principal idea characterizing Maimonides' interpretation of the Scriptures is that the texts are relevant to all people at all times. His Biblical-philosophical exegesis took four variables into consideration.

First, the linguistic component, whereby revelation is transmitted through a language, the semantic and syntactic characteristics of which cannot be ignored.

Second, the historical perspective, by which Biblical issues and stories can only be understood in the light of their particular historical situations; taking into account, for example, the nature of a society that practises idolatry, or one that is not scientifically advanced.

Philosophy may therefore be taught using one of two methods: the Greek way, in technical language and by constructing systems that can only be understood after a lengthy initiation; or the Hebrew way, by encoding philosophy in a symbolic text and transmitting the key of interpretation from teacher to disciple.

The third variable in Maimonides' interpretation of the Scriptures is the psychological dimension—prophecy and revelation take place through the mediation of human beings. Anthropological and psychological characteristics are reflected in the very content of revelation.

A fourth variable, *Sod* (secret), is the use of esotericism as a teaching aid. The sacred texts must take into consideration the exis- ▶

Photo © Diodoro Urquia, Salduero, Soria, Spain

Detail of a miniature from a manuscript of Maimonides'* Mishne Torah, *copied in Portugal in 1472, today preserved in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Maimonides is represented clutching a roll of parchment, possibly the* Mishne Torah *itself.

Photo © Bodleian Library, Oxford

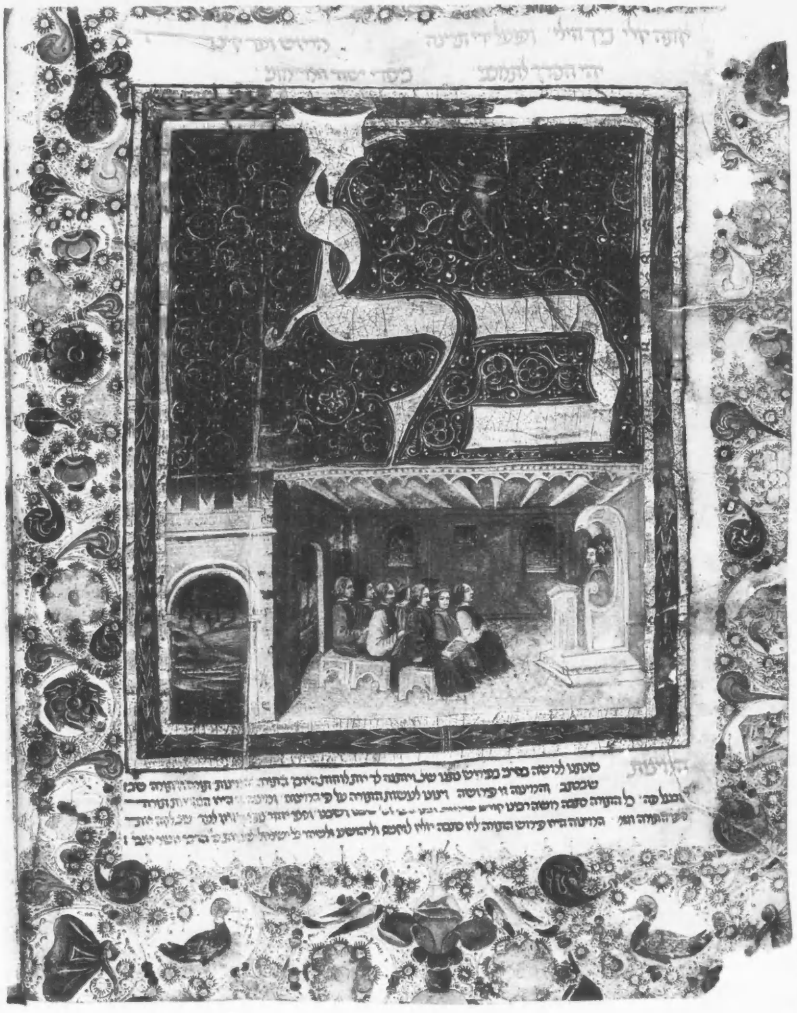

Photo © Vatican Library, Rome

Pages from two parchment manuscripts of the* Mishne Torah. *Right, a master teaching from his pulpit as depicted in a manuscript illuminated in northern Italy in the second half of the 15th century. Above, page from a manuscript copied in German rabbinical script by a scribe called Selomo.

▶ tence of many people who are incapable of attaining philosophical perfection and whose exposure to metaphysical truths may be dangerous for them and for society.

Maimonides applied this method to his own writings. In the introduction to his major work, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, he deliberately warns the reader that esoteric views are concealed in his book in such a way that only those who study the whole text will be able to find them. He sees this as the inner meaning of the Sage's saying: "...apples of gold in settings of silver" (*Proverbs*, chapter XXV, verse 11). The "silver" structure of the *Guide* was immediately obvious and admired, but the nature of the inner "golden" content is still being debated.

As a result of its author's method, Maimonides' book has an impressive architectonic structure which connects all its parts. One constantly finds new secret doors leading to an unmapped labyrinth of cross-references and varied hints, a guide to the hidden philosophical treasure—sometimes different treasures for different readers.

Maimonides was a great philosopher. To fully understand his system the reader would be obliged to abandon his contemporary world-view and adopt the medieval scientific and philosophic mentality. It is important to note, however, that his teachings nevertheless still have relevance today. They are undoubtedly controversial; Maimonides never intended to be "popular". A meaningful presentation of Maimonidean thought would entail translating more of his ideas into our modern vocabulary.

In an attempt to summarize his ideals of human behaviour, I would present them as a scale of four values which need to be attained sequentially: Society, Self-realization, Transcendence and Politics. Such a sequence will allow better understanding of each stage.

Further clarification can also be achieved by using a theatrical analogy. We can consider a play from three different angles. It can be understood as the realization of the instructions of the script; or, from the standpoint of the director, as the realization of a certain situation on the stage; or as psychodrama, wherein the play's central function lies in the influence it has on the actors. In the same way, ethics can be understood either as deontological, as the fulfilment of the ethical categorical imperatives; or as utilitarian, fulfilling a social function; or as a means of self-transformation.

Society. The first condition of human development is the existence of a healthy society that assures the basic freedoms of the individual. Maimonides thought that human beings are, as Aristotle wrote, "social by nature". But people are individuals, distinct and different from one another. This is a divine blessing but also an imminent danger. The political structure is the instrument through which society governs itself and provides a possibility for the individual to develop.

Maimonides severely criticized the authoritarian and fanatical regimes of his time, and yearned for a return to the ancient Biblical and Greek systems in which true religion, science and philosophy could flourish. His own experiences of wanderings and persecution bear witness to his sincerity.

This is the first version of ethics: social ethics, our duties in society.

Self-realization. Society is not an end in itself. There is no such entity as a "people-by-itself". A people, a nation, is above all a construction in which the real elements are the individuals. Society has to enable the development and full self-realization of each of its members. However, Maimonides did not believe that this self-realization involves an arbitrary choice. A "human essence" exists, and people have to find it. The central imperative is "Grow!", and society has to make this possible.

Here we find Maimonides' version of ethics as self-transformation, the idea of individual ethics moulded on the model of the psychodrama. Ethics must enable people to grow, to develop all their faculties, especially their intellectual faculties. Only then can the individual attain the central human aim, the knowledge of truth. Reason is the divine image that resides in every one of us.

The ideas presented up to this point can be illustrated with Maimonides' exposition of the Paradise story. The Biblical story seems to present a fools' paradise in which suffering came to the world when Adam ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. This, however, is an incorrect interpretation. The Paradise story is an archetypical representation of the human condition. True knowledge and, as we shall see later, the possibility of transcending the human condition are represented by the Tree of Life. The knowledge of the Tree of Knowledge is not the knowledge of true and false, but of good and evil.

Without going too deeply into the ramifications of Maimonides' explanation, it is clear that two types of knowledge are presented here: objective, rational knowledge as opposed to subjectively distorted systems constructed by rampant, uncontrolled imagination. The Paradise story is not set in the outside world, and in historical time, but in our own souls. A continuous struggle takes place between Adam and the serpent—the representation of irrational forces in man. As Goya masterfully portrayed it, dreams of reason engender monsters.

Accordingly, the Messianic age does not mean changes in the laws of nature, but according to Maimonides represents the age when people will be cured from their spiritual blindness which makes them harmful to their fellow men as well as to themselves.

Transcendence. Had Maimonides remained at this stage in his thought, his teachings would be very similar to those of other rationalistic systems in the history of philosophy. However, he used the philosophical background of his time which treated the possibility of conjunction with a supra-human reality, the "Active Intellect" of medieval tradition. The implication of this philosophy is that beyond natural discursive rational activity there is an additional epistemological category, the intuitive way of prophecy, and the ultimate possibility of conjunction with what transcends common human experience.

We cannot say whether or not Maimonides accepted the reality of mystical experience, and I would instead prefer to speak of some form of meta-intellectual experience, modelled on Biblical prophecy and attaining its highest level with Moses. According to the rabbis, Moses died the "death by a kiss". This kiss, as in the allegory of the *Song of Songs*, is the true immortality, the union of the soul with transcendence.

Politics. "In the Ways of the Lord." At this stage, Maimonides' thought resembles that of many mystical thinkers, and he might have succumbed to the temptation of those who achieve perfection and bliss and forget society. However he goes on to close the circle, with the symbol of Jacob's ladder, by which God's envoys go up and down. We have seen him so far on his way up, but he speaks also of a return to society. The prophet is not only interested in his own personal experience; he has a duty to return and bring redemption to society. This is not because he needs society but because, now that he has reached the highest level of morality, he must go in the ways of the Lord. God had left His own perfect solitude and, in an act of grace, created the world. In his imitation we find the real meaning of politics, and we are able to return to the first stage, that of society. These are the roots of the Bible, the message of prophecy, that a new cycle begins at the point when the prophet returns to the people and presents them with a deontological system.

Every summary is necessarily a distortion of the whole, and this is no exception. However if something may be added to soften the sharp edges of misunderstanding, it would be the idea of the absolute responsibility of the elite.

There are pseudo-elites in the same way as idolatry is a pseudo-religion. Continuing Maimonides' exegesis of the Paradise story, we could say that stationed in front of the Tree of Life there are angels with whirling swords; and that there are always people who mistake the flash of the sword for the shine of the Tree itself, as do those who confuse drugs with mystical experience. There will always be false prophets of whom humanity should beware.

Intellectuals, scientists and scholars are not prophets, but according to Maimonides they are an elite and they influence the future development of the world. The true political, cultural and spiritual leader must obviously act neither in his own interests, nor as the representative of a single faction or group. He is bound to the general interests of the community. Maimonides' messianic ideals were, however, not restricted to one community. In the "end of days" the whole world will be free from the curse of war, and, as the prophet said, the earth will be as full of understanding as the oceans are full of water. ■

Photo © Academy of Sciences, Budapest

Page from a manuscript of the* Mishne Torah *copied in Cologne (Germany) in 1294-1296 AD by Nathan ben Shimon ha-Levi and completed in the same city in 1413. The miniatures appear to come from the Cambrai region of France or the mid-Rhine and date from the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century.

Below, portrait of Maimonides (left) with the Jewish philosopher Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508 AD) in an annotated edition of* The Guide of the Perplexed *published in 1904 in Vilna (now Vilnius, Lithuanian SSR).

Photo © Instituto Arias Montano, Madrid

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Photo © Mas, Barcelona

This statue of Averroës, the work of the brothers Agapito and Venancio Vallmitjana, Spanish sculptors of the second half of the 19th century, stands in an alcove at the University of Barcelona.

Averroës, reason and tolerance

by M.A. Sinaceur

IN reflecting on Averroës, it is not my wish to evoke the man whom Latin Schoolmen held in boundless admiration or the researcher whose commentaries on Aristotle rivalled in power of thought the works he was analysing. Nor shall I dwell here on his life as a sober, pious judge or on the affinity of his approach with that developed by the great Islamic jurists, an approach characterized by a spirit of frank self-questioning. Instead I shall concentrate on two ideas, two notions which bring us abruptly face to face with real problems, real questions, eternally posed.

The first of these is the notion of the unity of reason. To know, it is postulated, is to acknowledge participation in universal knowledge. I use the word *reason* instead of the term *intellect* which Averroës used, true to the terminology of the philosophers of Alexandria and Baghdad. To transpose in this way is not to yield to lack of rigour and precision; it is simply a refusal to succumb to pettifogging and indecision or to bend the knee to a form of erudition for erudition's sake.

The unity of reason, then, was what Averroës propounded, an overriding concept which inspired audacious developments. For the French philosopher/writer Ernest Renan (1823-1892) it was human thought taken as a whole, "a universal phenomenon stemming from superior powers". Unity of reason encompasses the principles on which we base the demonstration that takes us a step further, the proof that succeeds, the experiment which achieves its end. It is the unity of the psychological make-up of mankind—the hardships and vices that engender evil and suffering, and the faculties that enable us to construct the city of harmony and peace. It is humanity one and indivisible, living and permanent, as essential to itself as is personal dignity to the most individualistic of individuals, which the most intimate, innermost truth affords to him who recognizes and acknowledges it. Thus he who knows and is, is no more, as individual, than a splendid specimen of the Universal.

The second idea is not unconnected with the first. Reason cannot destroy faith. Both express the same truth. Now this was a notion that was as bound to displease the Schoolmen of old as it does the ideologists of today. Two truths, it should be remembered, cannot contradict each other. But, a word of caution, this is a truth that no single statement can exhaust, not inert truths that one can take hold of and possess. The real Averroës was a practitioner of rational tolerance, a tolerance which was neither complaisant, sceptical nor moralistic:

1. Reason should seek neither purposeless confrontation with nor the destruction of the faith of those for whom it is a necessity. Among men there are many kinds of exchanges, undertakings and beliefs. Yet men can live together quite happily in a world in which opinions are varied and diverse. This is because there are opinions that merit respect; and to respect implies to explain and to understand.

2. Reason demands that we examine other cultures in a spirit of understanding and objectivity: "We accept with joy whatever is in conformity with truth—truth, that is, which is the outcome of research; ... that which is not in conformity with truth we shall point out and excuse..." No matter whence it comes or where it originates, validity is the only condition knowledge has to fulfil. Knowledge is not the sole constituent of the heritages of the different cultures; each of them also encompasses conceptions that comfort or disturb.

3. Finally—although Averroës did not state this explicitly it is implicit in the whole thrust of his argument—what applies to religion and to philosophy applies also to any body of beliefs: concealed behind two apparently opposed truths lies an identity waiting to be discovered. Such an opposition is an invitation to research, to meditation, to the elaboration of a unity which goes beyond the apparently contradictory expressions of diversity.

By dint of excessive study, philological examination and pointless and laborious annotation it is possible to obscure the clearest lines of thought — such as those most dear to Averroës, and the most meaningful of his life. And it is these latter that have the power to move us. At a time when people are wondering anxiously whether there is today a place for such a thing as "modern humanism", the least we can hope is that in recalling his ideas we shall ensure the continuance of the essential principles he stated so strongly.

One day Averroës was informed of a holy man's method of curing men and women by making them pay out sums of money equivalent to the supposed value, as determined by him, of their affected organs. Instead of launching into a diatribe against superstition, Averroës declared: "There goes a man who believes that a human being can be moved by the act of giving." It is to be hoped that evocation of the path followed by Averroës, the path of totally frank and open thought, has power to move the hearts of men today. ■

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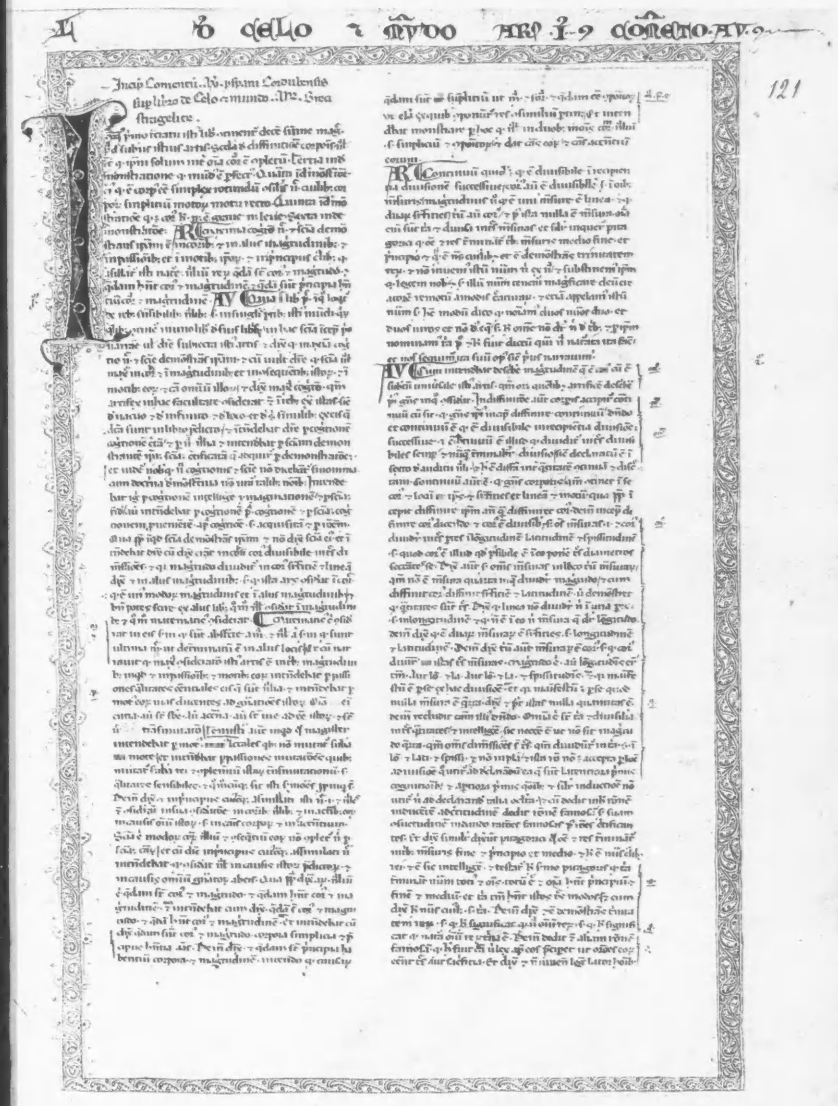
Ibn Rushd and the Islamic philosophical tradition

by Artur V. Sagadeev



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Page from a medieval manuscript in Latin of the commentary by Averroës on Aristotle's "Book On the Heavens and On the World". Latin translations of works by the great Cordoban Arab philosopher multiplied very quickly, above all thanks to the famous School of Translators in Toledo, where Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars worked closely together.

THE name of Ibn Rushd (Averroës) has become a symbol of freedom of thought and rationalism, of rejection of mysticism in all its forms and of blind faith in the Holy Scriptures. The influence of the Cordoban philosopher has spread widely, both through his own writings and through the works of his European disciples, the Averroists, as well as through attacks from their opponents, who went so far as to claim that Ibn Rushd was the author of the doctrine of the "three imposters" (Moses, Jesus and Muhammad) which once unleashed a storm of controversy.

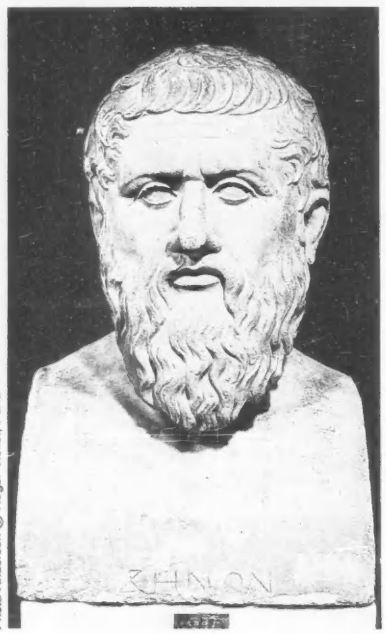
Scorn has been poured on Ibn Rushd's concept that the individual soul is mortal, but that human reason is immortal. This idea has become familiar to us in the works of Duns Scotus, Dante, Herder, Kant and other writers associated with the idea of unity in human intellectual and moral development.

Ibn Rushd's reputation is certainly not undeserved, but to some extent it obscures the merits of the eastern Muslim philosophers who preceded him, especially al-Fārābī (c.870-950) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980-1037), whose teachings, in the opinion of certain scholars, pointed towards a reconciliation of reason and faith, and thus lacked the internal coherence of Ibn Rushd's thought. In fact, not only had these earlier philosophers made possible the birth of Hispano-Arabic philosophy, and its fruition in Ibn Rushd; they were also the true authors of theories often credited to him.

The differences between Ibn Rushd and his predecessors were not due to a lesser degree of consistency in defining the scope of rationalism or of fidelity to the philosophy of Aristotle. They were due to the distinctive features of the social, cultural and political situation in the Muslim East and West during medieval times. These differences do not relate to the fundamental principle of the autonomy of human reason, but simply to the methods of its application to doctrines of the "ideal city".

The most complete expression of Ibn Rushd's rationalism is to be found in his "Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy", a work in which he divides people into three categories: the "rhetorical class", the "dialecticians" and the "demonstrative class". For the first category, convictions are the fruit of rhetorical argument to which they turn when they wish to convince their listeners of a certain point, without taking the validity of the point into account. The second category uses "dialectical arguments", in the Aristotelian sense of the term, that is to say their ▶

Averroës was the greatest medieval interpreter of Classical Greco-Latin thought. In his turn he passed on this heritage to other important thinkers, such as his compatriot Maimonides, and to Christian philosophers and theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Albertus Magnus and Duns Scotus, who regarded him as "The Commentator" on Aristotle. Below, a bust of Plato from the Vatican Museum in Rome. Right, Persian miniature showing Aristotle in the form of a corpulent seated mullah, taken from a manuscript in Persian verse entitled Aphorisms on Hygiene, attributed to Aristotle.



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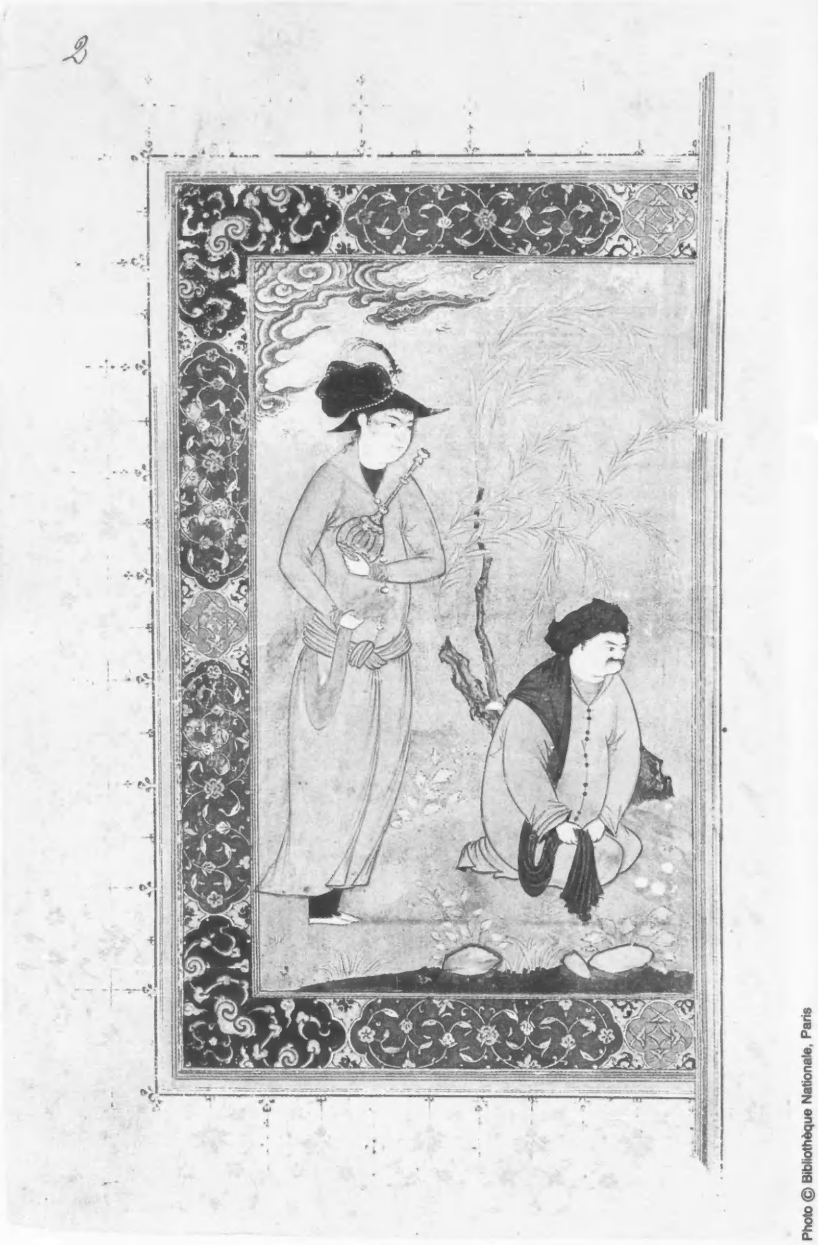

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▶ opinions are based on "generally accepted", plausible premises, unsuitable for procuring true knowledge. Members of the third category reach their convictions through demonstrations based on sound premises.

Ibn Rushd identifies the rhetoricians with the "overwhelming mass", with the "crowd", that is, the body of faithful who do not aspire to the subtleties of theology, and even less to those of philosophy. The dialecticians are the representatives of speculative (theoretical) theology, and those who belong to the "demonstrative class" are the philosophers who, in all societies, constitute a small intellectual elite which is alone capable of acquiring true knowledge.

Ibn Rushd was not the originator of this theory; it was expounded in detail by Ibn Sīnā, and before him by al-Fārābī. Eastern Muslim philosophers were already classifying arguments into "apodictic" (demonstrative), "dialectical", "rhetorical", "sophistical" and "poetical", in decreasing order of cognitive value, ranging from "absolutely true" apodictic arguments to "absolutely false" poetical arguments.

Poetical arguments occupy the lowest step on the ladder because they take into consideration, not the objective existence of objects, but their images, which are the result of the purest subjectivity. These arguments act on people's imagination, not their reason, inciting positive or negative emotions. "Poetical" and "rhetorical" arguments were identified with religion; "sophistical" and "dialectical" arguments with speculative theology.

In their conception of the relation between faith and knowledge, Ibn Rushd, Ibn

Sīnā and al-Fārābī all share the basic conviction that religion is a "political art" which is only necessary to society insofar as society consists of an overwhelming majority of people incapable of assimilating abstract, theoretical truths, and for whom religion is the only means of providing their relationships with a moral and legal framework.

They teach that philosophy and religion are related to the extent that they are both concerned with the foundations of existence. But this link is no more than nominal. Al-Fārābī prefers to regard religion as the daughter-in-law, not the daughter, of philosophy; and Ibn Rushd sees them as sisters by upbringing, but not by blood. For as far as knowledge is concerned, science and religion are strangers, insofar as reason works through rigorous demonstration, while faith is based on rhetoric and mythical, poetical images.

As for the assertion that Ibn Rushd's predecessors had made concessions to theology and mysticism, it is simply the result of a widespread but radically mistaken view of the history of medieval Arabic Muslim philosophy, according to which this philosophy owes its specific features to a blind take-over, by the Muslim world, of the legacy of Antiquity, integrating into Aristotelian metaphysics ideas borrowed from Neoplatonic works wrongly attributed to Aristotle.

Ibn Rushd's great merit is thus considered to be that of refining the Aristotelian ideas from this Neoplatonic "dross". The falsity of such an interpretation is shown solely by the fact that neither al-Kindī (c. 800-870), who laid the foundations of Eastern Aristotelianism, nor al-Fārābī who systematized it, confused Aristotelian and Neoplatonic works, as can be seen from their own treatises which review the complete works of the great thinker of Antiquity.

An analysis of the work of al-Fārābī, held responsible for this "original sin" of Arabic philosophy, clearly shows that the Neoplatonic theory of emanationism (extra-temporal emission of existence from a single point of origin) has been incorporated into it quite deliberately, as a doctrine capable of formally reconciling the Aristotelian thesis of the eternal existence of the world and the religious dogma of its creation.

This reconciliation was essential, considering the social and political situation of the Muslim East in the tenth century, while philosophers were faced with the prospect of the foundation of a type of "ideal State" along the lines of the "ideal city" of Plato's *Republic*. As in Plato, philosophers would be at the head of such a State, the ideological foundations of which would be a religion, also ideal, modelled on philosophy. The theory of emanationism would be at the centre of such a religion.

Photo © Jean-Loup Charmet, Paris

In his works Averroës takes up the basic contribution of the Classical Greek philosophers, which does not imply that he was merely a follower who continued their work. On the contrary, the Cordoban philosopher marks the apogee of a great current of Islamic philosophy originating in Eastern Muslim thinkers of the standing of al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) and culminating in the thinkers and philosophers of al-Andalus. Above, imaginary portrait of Ibn Sīnā from* Authentic Portraits and Lives of Illustrious Men, Greek, Latin and Pagan *(1581) by the French monk and traveller André Thévet. It is now in the Museum of the History of Medicine, Paris.

Photos © Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid

Coins from al-Andalus and the Maghreb (from top to bottom): Yahya al-Mamūm dirham, Toledo, 1069 AD; 'Abbādid dinar of al-Mu'tamid, Seville, 1082 AD; Almoravid dinar of Ali Ibn Yusuf, Fez, 1132 AD.

The great success in the eastern Muslim world of Ismailian Shi'ite movements, heralding the imminent collapse of the 'Abbāsid caliphate, an "empire of evil" founded on a "false religion", made possible the existence of doctrines of the "ideal city". The situation in the western Muslim world was very different. Neither in al-Andalus nor in the Maghreb were there any objective presuppositions allowing for the dream of a State based on any ideology other than that of the existing religious doctrine.

This explains why the ideal situation for Ibn Bājja (died 1139), the first great Aristotelian philosopher of these regions, is that of isolated individuals who, by way of intellectual and moral perfection, achieve happiness while continuing to live in an imperfect State. In exactly the same way, Ibn Tufayl (died 1185), an older contemporary and friend of Ibn Rushd, thought that such a situation is the prerogative of individuals, but not of society as a whole. Finally Ibn Rushd himself explicitly stresses the futility of attempts to elaborate "rationalized" forms of religion.

Like his Eastern predecessors, Ibn Rushd considered it essential to interpret allegorically those passages in the Qur'an which contradict philosophical principles of understanding the world, but he favoured an even sharper dividing-line between the realm of knowledge and that of faith, between science and religion. Al-Fārābī tolerated the activity of speculative theologians in the ideal State, while reducing the role of ▶

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theology to that of a servant of philosophy, content to underpin the positions taken by the ruling philosophers. On the other hand Ibn Rushd, in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, excludes theologians from the affairs of State. Moreover, he recommends that Muslim leaders should ban the works of theologians because they contain within them the seeds of dissidence, and may encourage the appearance of all kinds of sects, which could plunge society into the abyss of civil war.

The above remarks systematically contradict the idea, still too often put forward, that Arab philosophers were mere commentators, just capable of repeating, with greater or lesser degrees of success, the doctrines of their Greek masters from the Classical or Hellenistic periods. In fact, their relationship with the philosophical tradition of Antiquity was infinitely more selective, critical and creative. Arabic philosophy, as exemplified by Ibn Rushd and his Eastern predecessors, was a philosophy which responded to the demands of progressive forces in "theologized" societies, which were qualitatively a far cry from the society of Antiquity. The ground was thereby prepared for a philosophical thought freed from the grip of the Church—that of medieval Western Europe, the Renaissance and modern times. The legacy of the Eastern and Western traditions of the Muslim world thus blended into the creative philosophical thought of all mankind.

■

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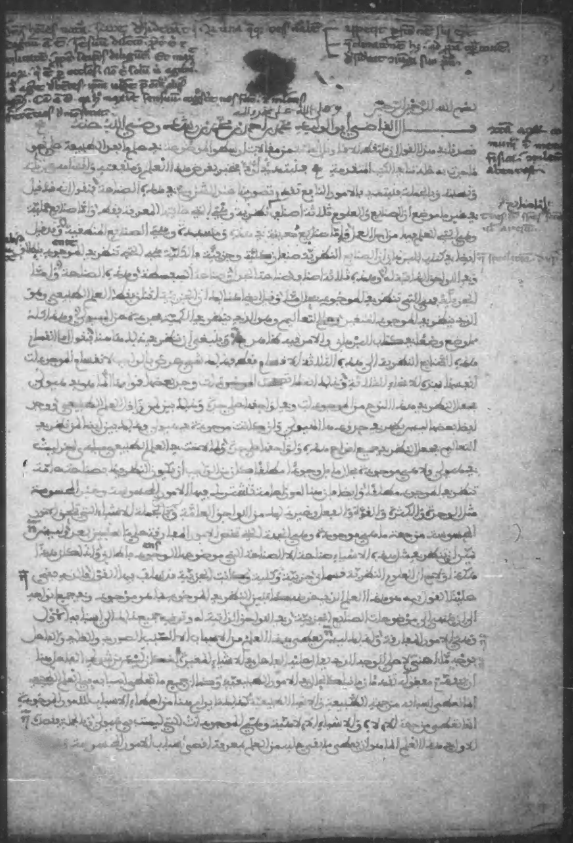

Top, page from an early 15th-century manuscript copied in Maghrebi Arabic script of the* Kitāb al-Kulliyāt *("Book of the General Principles of Medicine"), the basic medical work of Averroës. Right, manuscript page in the same script of Averroës' book* The Syntheses, *with marginal notes in Arabic, Hebrew and Latin. The book contains six treatises, each of which is a commentary on a work of Aristotle.

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Maimonides the humanist

by Angel Sáenz-Badillos

WHEN we cast our twentieth-century minds back to the work of a medieval thinker, we must look not so much for objective facts or accurate theories which may have associations or implications for our own period as for general attitudes.

A twelfth-century philosopher such as Moses ben Maymūn, or Maimonides, was wholly a man of his time. He was influenced by his personal circumstances—he was an emigrant and an exile for much of his life; by the categories which shaped the evolution of thought in the Jewish community; and by the assumptions and problems which preoccupied philosophy in his time. To this extent, his thought reflects the peculiarities of a minority religious community immersed in the main currents of predominant Islamic thought in the Middle East, North Africa and the greater part of Spain.

A superficial glance at the work of any medieval philosopher may only reveal his responses to problems arising from histor- ▶

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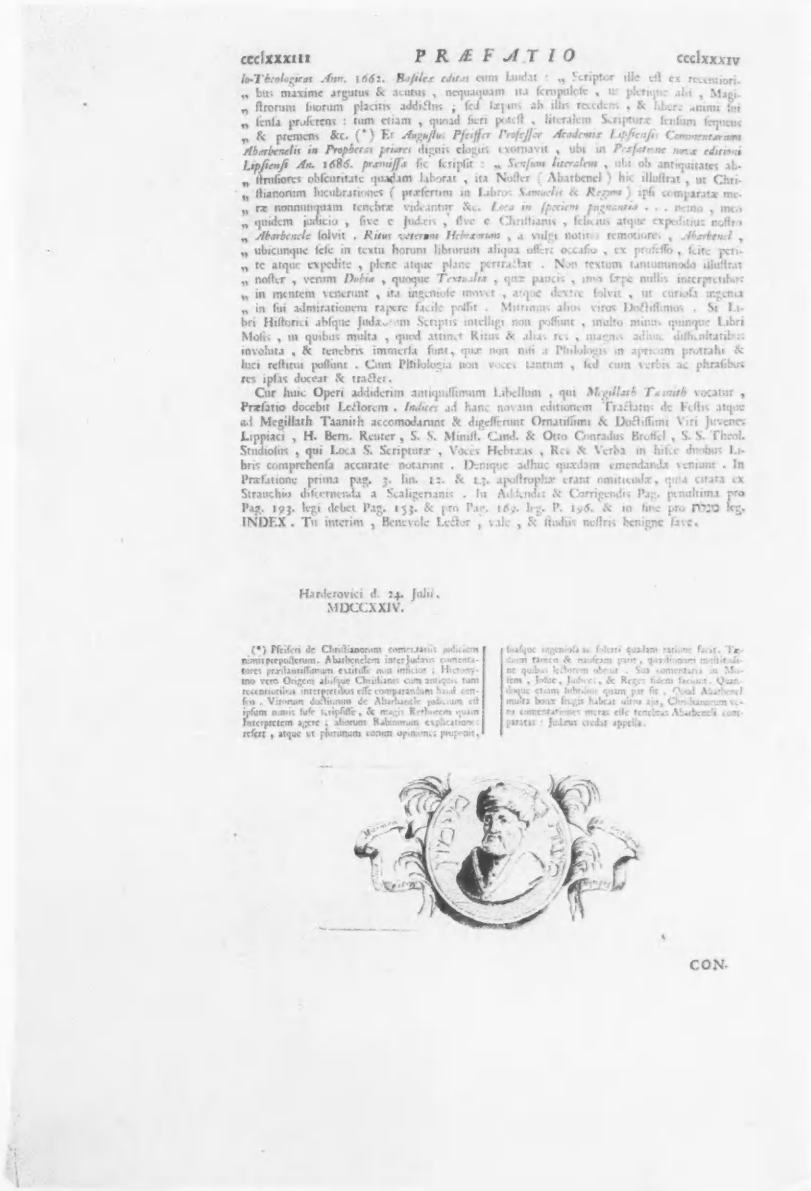
Two portraits of Maimonides: right, the first known graphic representation of the Hispano-Jewish philosopher appeared in a book by Biagio Ugolini,* Thesaurus antiquitatum sacrarum, *published in Venice, 1744. Maimonides' name is written in Hebrew in a banderole. Above, white marble bas relief by Brenda Putnam dates from 1949. It is one of 23 medallions which commemorate the great legislators of humanity and can be seen in the House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.



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Io-Theologicus Amst. 1662. *Bafilex editus* eum laudat : „ Scriptor ille eſt ex recentioribus maxime argutus & acutus , nequaquam ita ſcrupuloſe , ut plerique alii , Magiſtrorum ſuorum placitis addictus ; ſed ſæpius ab illis recedens , & libere animi ſui ſenſa proferens : tum etiam , quoad fieri poteſt , literalem Scripturæ ſenſum ſequens & premens &c. (*) Et *Auguſtus Pfeiffer Profeſſor Academiæ Lipſienſis Commentatorum Abarbenelis in Prophetas priores* dignis elogiis exornavit , ubi in *Præfatione novæ editionis Lipſienſi An.* 1686. *præmiſſa* ſic ſcripſit : „ *Senſum literalem* , ubi ob antiquitates abſtruſiores obſcuritate quadam laborat , ita Noſter (Abarbenel) hic illuſtrat , ut Chriſtianorum hucubrationes (præſertim in Libros *Samuelis* & *Regum*) ipſi comparatæ meræ nonnunquam tenebræ videantur &c. *Loca in ſpeciem pugnantia* . . . nemo , meo quidem judicio , ſive e Judæis , ſive e Chriſtianis , felicius atque expeditius noſtro *Abarbenele* ſolvit . *Ritus veterum Hebræorum* , a vulgi notitia remotiores , *Abarbenel* , ubicunque ſeſe in textu horum librorum aliqua offerr occaſio , ex profeſſo , ſatis perite atque expedite , plene atque plane pertractat . Non textum tantummodo illuſtrat noſter , verum *Dubia* , quoque *Textualia* , quæ paucis , imo ſæpe nullis interpretibus in mentem venerunt , ita ingeniose movet , atque dextre ſolvit , ut curioſa ingenia in ſui admirationem rapere facile poſſit . Mirimus alios viros Doctiſſimos . Si Libri Hiſtorici abſque Judæorum Scriptis intelligi non poſſunt , multo minus quinque Libri Moſis , in quibus multa , quod attinet Ritus & alias res , magnis adhuc difficultatibus involuta , & tenebris immerſa ſunt , quæ non niſi a Philologis in apricum protrahi & luci reſtitui poſſunt . Cum Philologia non voces tantum , ſed cum verbis ac phraſibus res ipſas doceat & tradet.

Cur hunc Operi addiderim antiquiſſimum Libellum , qui *Megillath Taanith* vocatur , Præfatio docebit Lectorem . *Indices* ad hanc novam editionem Tractatus de Feſtis atque ad Megillath Taanith accomodarunt & digeſſerunt Ornatiſſimi & Doctiſſimi Viri Juvenes Lippiaci , H. Bern. Reuter , S. S. Miniſt. Cand. & Otto Conradus Broſſel , S. S. Theol. Studioſus , qui Loca S. Scripturæ , Voces Hebræas , Res & Verba in hiſce duobus Libris comprehenſa accurate notarunt . Denique adhuc quædam emendanda veniunt . In Præfatione prima pag. 3. lin. 12. & 13. apoſtrophæ erant omittendæ, quia citata ex Strauchio diſcernenda a Scaligeranis . In Addendis & Corrigendis Pag. penultima pro Pag. 193. legi debet Pag. 153. & pro Pag. 162. leg. P. 196. & in fine pro כוכבת leg. INDEX . Tu interim , Benevole Lector , vale , & ſtudiis noſtris benigne fave.

Hardervici d. 24. Julii.
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(*) Pfeifero de Chriſtianorum commentariis judicium nimis præpoſterum. Abarbenelem inter Judæos contentatores præſtantiſſimum extitiſſe non inficior ; Hieronymo vero Origen aliique Chriſtianæ cum antiquis tum recentioribus interpretibus eſſe comparandum haud cenſeo . Virorum doctorum de Abarbanele judicium eſt ipſum nimis ſæpe krisiſſe , & magis Rethorem quam Interpretem agere ; aliorum Rabinorum explicationes refert , atque ut plurimum eorum opiniones proponit, ſuaſque ingeniola ac ſolerti quadam ratione facit. Tandem tamen & tandem patet , quæcunque meditatione quibus lectorem obruat . Sua commentaria in Moſem , Joſue , Judices , & Reges ſidem faciunt. Quandoque etiam fabulam quam par eſt . Quod Abarbenel multa boux frugis habeat ultro ajo, Chriſtianorum veteres contentatores meræ eſſe tenebras Abarbenelis comparatas : Judæus credat appello.

CON-

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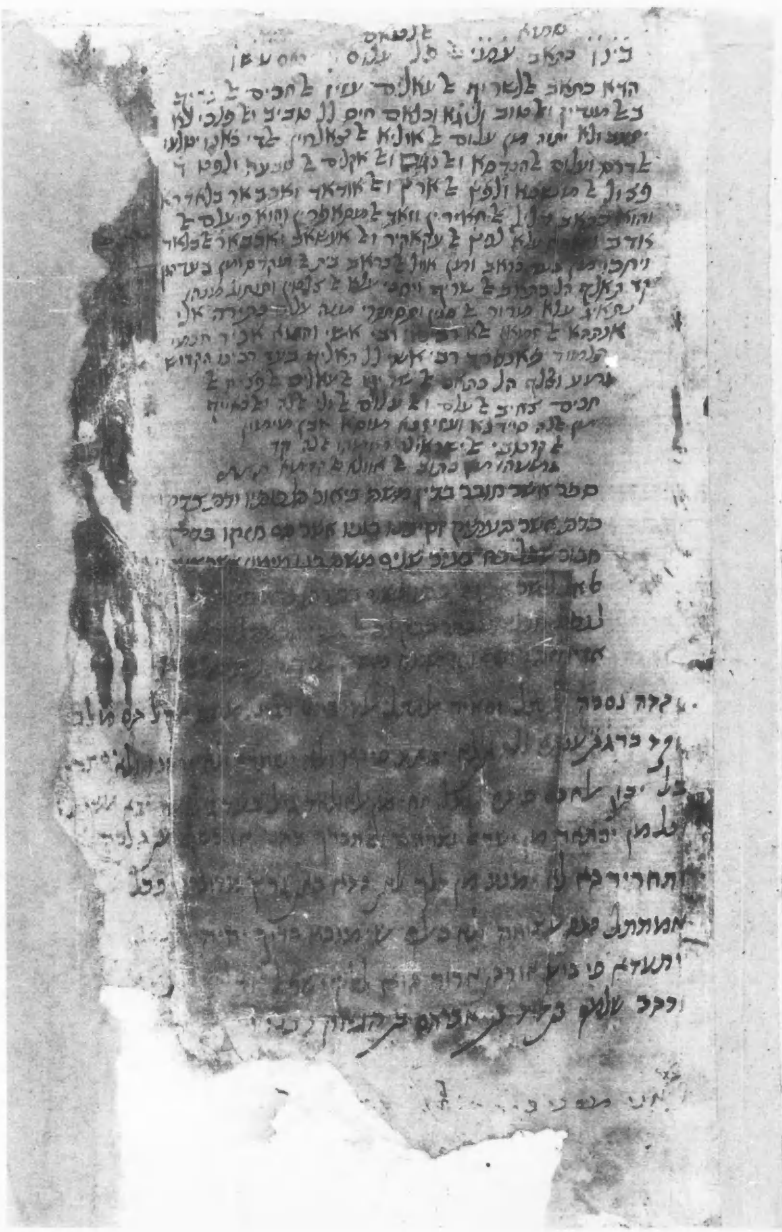
Three of many postage stamps commemorating Maimonides from different countries. From left to right, 1967 Spanish stamp depicting his statue in Córdoba; 1953 stamp from Israel; stamp issued by Grenada in 1970.



Fragment of a holograph manuscript on paper of the "Commentary on the Mishna", written in Arabic with Hebrew characters, as was Maimonides' custom. A commentary on the first "Order" of the Mishna, it was written around 1168 AD, shortly after its author's arrival in Cairo.

Photo © Bodleian Library, Oxford

ical circumstances, and may thus overlook a much deeper dimension. It seldom happens that great thinkers radically overturn the categories of their time; instead they usually take such categories as their starting point and go on to open up new possibilities and directions for human thought and conduct to explore, so that giant strides forward may be made, untrammelled by the spider web of current ideas. This attitude of transcending time, of standing poised at a turning point, distinguishes the great thinkers of the past. We would venture to suggest that Maimonides was undoubtedly one of the great medieval thinkers and one of those who most successfully broke new ground.

While most of his fellow Jews saw a radical opposition between the universe of their faith, the Torah or Law of Moses, and the universe of human knowledge, science and philosophy inherited from the Greeks, Maimonides was one of the masters of Judaic learning who clearly understood that such a dichotomy was spurious. In his view, the human sciences cannot be diametrically opposed to faith; instead, they must complement it and help to make it more profound.

Ultimately, the contents of Aristotelian philosophy and those of the Jewish faith share the same essence. For Maimonides, the religious ideal is attainable only by someone who is capable of assimilating knowledge of both the human and the divine. Moses and Aristotle join hands to help humanity to the summit of perfection, namely the knowledge and love of God. We should remember that the society in which he lived, and especially his own Jewish community, held a totally religious and God-centred view of the universe. Maimonides did not break with this position, but he insisted that room must be made for another, more specifically human, component: reason or philosophy. Few medieval thinkers did more than he to end the conflict between faith and reason.

Maimonides' rationalism is a facet of his humanism. To be a rationalist in the Middle Ages meant casting out ontological horror of the supernatural and the unknown, putting an end to irrational human fears, combating all kinds of alienation and refusing to accept any of the moral imperatives imposed on humanity by some arbitrary Will: in other words, it meant humanizing the faith of the believer. Medieval man was fundamentally a believer, as was Maimonides. His efforts, however, were directed towards building a much more human universe, albeit still with God at its centre. Man, the being who aspires to a loving union with God, will attain this ultimate aim only by fully realizing his human potential, by leading a more worthy life and by casting out ignorance in order to improve his conduct.

Maimonides wished to help his contemporaries to free themselves from their perplexities, from all kinds of superstitions which enslaved them and even from the passions which dragged them down and prevented them from becoming fully human. To emphasize the rational aspect was not, as he saw it, to reject the theocentric pattern of his universe, but to readjust the focus on reality so that everything was in its proper place. Man does not accede to divine love through false mysticism, on the paths of irrationality where he can disguise his ignorance, but on the highroad to knowledge, wisdom and learning in the human sciences, complemented by theology. As man advances along this highroad, he must never renounce the use of his own intelligence or be lured away by the irrational and unknown. Likewise in the field of ethics, man is not the plaything of an arbitrary Supreme Being; the commandments contained in the Law of Moses all have a reason for their existence and are not obligations capriciously imposed on the human will. Maimonides thus constructed a style of humanism which was still religious, but which was primarily human.

This humanism led him to combat the alienation of man and everything which diverted him from his true purpose in the universe. Maimonides opposed all kinds of idolatry, because he considered it to be one of the most dangerous forms of alienation: to worship the spheres, the stars or graven images, to become a slave to superstition, to believe in astrology or to practise any kind of primitive religious rites, prevents man from realizing his full potential. Even feverish involvement in an economic activity that is not necessary for the fulfilment of one's own needs he regarded as another form of alienation, comparable to becoming a slave to the basest passions. For Maimonides, reason and knowledge represent true liberation for humanity.

Photo © Nationalbibliothek, Vienna

Twelfth century miniature depicting Maimonides examining a flask of urine. As well as a philosopher and religious thinker, Moses ben Maymūn was, like Ibn Rushd, one of the greatest physicians of his time, and in his numerous medical works (*Commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates, Compendium of the Books of Galen, Treatise on Asthma, Guide to Good Health *...) he summarized and developed contemporary knowledge in this field.

The evil that exists in the universe is not the work of God, but the consequence of what some human beings do to others, or the harm that man does to himself. And nearly always, it is a consequence of ignorance. Only knowledge, which for the human being is akin to the gift of sight, is capable of driving out enmity and hatred. Someone without knowledge is like a blind man stumbling against walls and blundering into other people. One of the evils that people can inflict on one another is tyranny. True knowledge is the necessary condition for the historical redemption of humanity.

Such is Maimonides' breadth of spirit that it transcends the narrow bounds of the majority of his fellow worshippers, and he thinks not so much in Jewish categories as in a new and universal dimension. The way to God is not reserved for the chosen people, but is open to all humankind. The great Greek philosophers had travelled far along the road to true knowledge, just as the promises in the Bible were made not only to Jewish people but to all humanity.

Thus Maimonides remains loyal to the faith of his ancestors, but at the same time he embraces all peoples with his genuinely universal outlook. Despite having suffered from it personally, he never gives way to the temptation of fanaticism. He believes that the other monotheistic religions have played a positive role in preparing the world for knowledge of the one true God and his Law. And although he sees all problems from the point of view of a devout Jew, his interpretation of the Law of Moses points the way towards better human understanding and a greater sense of the brotherhood of man. In this respect he was ahead of his time.

Maimonides has been criticized for failing to condemn slavery, for speaking contemptuously of half-savage peoples and for taking a very negative view of women and their role in society. It is true that he did not radically break out of the categories of his time on these issues, but he did succeed in pointing out new directions through his conception of human dignity.

He saw the individual hidden behind the outward façade of the slave, he pleaded for the redemption of the oppressed through education and fairer working conditions, and he placed women on an equal spiritual footing with men. He did not break with the past, but endeavoured to change the system of values and the attitudes of his day in order to build a more truly humane society. Herein, I believe, lies the source of his relevance to the present and his ability to influence modern thought. ■

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The prophet, the scholar and the statesman

by Roland Goetschel

THE philosophy of Moses Maimonides lies at the convergence of Jewish and Arab-Islamic thought; this explains the considerable importance accorded to political activity in his thinking and practice. This article is an attempt to rediscover the coherence of this philosophy through a discussion of his major work, *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

The need for political order. The starting point of Maimonides' thought is the nature of man whom, like Aristotle, he considers to be naturally a political animal. While other living creatures can very well look after themselves without help from other members of their species, this is not the case with the individual isolated human, who outside society would in the normal course of events be doomed to perish before very long. Man's food requirements alone necessitate the existence of an elaborate technology and a multiple division of labour, which would be inconceivable outside a political system: "This is why men need someone to guide and unite them, so that their society can be organized and perpetuated and so that they can give one another mutual assistance."

For Maimonides the need for government also emerges from the great diversity which exists between different members of the human species. There is need for a guide who can remedy what is defective and moderate what is excessive, who can impose a common and permanent law on the members of a society.

He distinguishes three kinds of political regimes. First, conventional legal regimes in which the aim of the legislator is simply to ensure that the affairs of the community are transacted in an orderly fashion, without insisting on the improvement of man and his rational faculty. The regime of Divine Law is different in the sense that it is concerned not only with material and social improvement but also with man's spiritual welfare, leading him to eternal happiness. There are also regimes which claim to be prophetic

For Maimonides, "the regime of Divine Law ... is concerned not only with material and social improvement but also with man's spiritual welfare" (R. Goetschel). Opposite page, the Tables of the Law (the code which Moses, the great legislator, gave to the Jewish people during the Exodus) from the Ben Ezra synagogue, Fostat (Old Cairo). Above, an illumination representing the Exodus of the Hebrews, taken from a manuscript of the Hebrew Haggada (book derived from the Talmud). This manuscript, copied in Spain in the 14th century, is today preserved in the Budapest Academy of Sciences (Kaufmann Collection).

and which have in fact borrowed all or part of their content from the true prophetic regime.

The prophet, the scholar and the statesman. Although all men possess the faculty of governing, this faculty will not be fully developed unless a man has brought his rational and his imaginative faculties to a state of perfection. If such is the case, he will be able to become a prophet when a divine emanation flows first of all into his intellect, then into his imagination. If this divine influence flows only into the man's intellect without being received by his imagination, he becomes a scholar who devotes himself to speculation. Conversely, if the divine emanation touches only his imagination without influencing his intellect, he will join the ranks of statesmen who make laws, or those of soothsayers or interpreters of omens.

It is clear from the above that conventional legal regimes are set up by politicians who draw substance from their imagination alone, while the regime of Divine Law is based on a prophetic gift, necessitating the two-fold perfection of the rational and the imaginative faculties. The true prophet combines the capacities of the politician and the scholar, while surpassing them both. The influence working on his intellect brings him the speculative insights which enable him to grasp the essential nature of things and makes him a superior philosopher.

The prophecy of Moses. The divine emanation sometimes comes to the prophet with a force sufficient for him to attain perfection for himself, and sometimes with a superabundance that allows him to strive to transform others. There are many degrees of prophets as there are many degrees of scholars. Maimonides also makes a major distinction between Moses and the other prophets. All prophets except Moses received the prophecy through an angel, whereas to Moses God spoke directly.

In his commentary on Chapter XXXIII of the *Book of Exodus*, Maimonides returns to the subject of Moses as legislator. If God would not reveal his essence to Moses, he nevertheless made known to him the thirteen attributes of God which allowed Moses to understand the nature of living beings and the links between them, thus teaching him how to govern over them. The ultimate aim of this revelation is therefore to establish political order: "And that was the final aim of his demand, for he ended by saying: *that I may know thee, that I may find favour in thy sight and consider that this nation is thy people,* which I must govern by means similar to thine." The ruler of the ideal city will therefore govern his State as far as possible according to the model furnished by God as ruler of the world.

The finality of the Divine Law. The object of the Law is to bring man to a full realization of both his spiritual and his bodily existence. This is achieved by the institution of civil peace as well as through the individual acquisition of virtues useful to society. The Law of Moses therefore carries within it a two-fold perfection: it establishes a perfect community, and it produces in man righteous ideas which will lead to happiness.

True human perfection is not found where it is commonly supposed. Most people think that perfection lies in assets which include the possession of power. As Maimonides wrote, "the possession of the title of a great king belongs to this class." But such perfection is external to the human essence. The two other perfections, that of the body and even moral perfection, are themselves only a means to intellectual perfection, which reaches its highest degree in the knowledge of God.

However, as Maimonides points out in a reference to *The Book of Jeremiah*, on the last page of the *Guide*, knowledge of God must not remain speculative, it should lead mankind to ensure that solidarity, law and justice prevail on earth. To know God is therefore to submit to ethical restraints, and this ultimate requirement should be the priority of the ideal ruler, for he more than all other men created in the image of God must accomplish "the imitation of God", the sovereign ruler of the universe. ■

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1986: Year of Peace / 9

In this article, Professor Jean Dausset (Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine, 1980) highlights the benefits of biological diversity, and stresses the unavoidable incompatibility between science and racism as an important factor in efforts to establish peace.

FEAR of difference, sometimes going so far as rejection, is a widespread reflex. Children are afraid of being different from their peers. Adolescents are the first to follow fashions. But, much more seriously, adults are almost instinctively wary of all those who do not belong to their group or community; this leads to neighbourhood rivalry, argument between administrative bodies, conflict between nations, religious or racial hatred.

This reflex is however both a biological absurdity and a basic error where cultural life is concerned. Three concepts from biology may help to clarify the issue:

First, each living being is different, even unique, since there are so many possible variations in its chemical composition. It is the product of a combination of paternal and maternal characters, which themselves came from a mixture of the characters of four grandparents. Moreover, these characters, or genes, show multiple variations within populations. In man, the number of possible combinations exceeds, it has been said, the number of atoms in the known universe. In each generation new beings thus appear, fruits of the genetic lottery, unique because formed from an entirely new combination of genetic characters. Nature has taken good care to ensure that this mixing happens at regular intervals: sexual reproduction and death repeat it for each generation.

Second, according to Darwinian natural selection, those individuals which fortuitously receive the combinations which render them best adapted to live in a certain environment, survive and produce most descendants, whereas the least well adapted produce fewer descendants. Thus, thanks to the diversity of the individuals of which it is composed, a species will be able to adapt to changes that may occur in the environment or climate, or to the appearance of new parasites or pathogenic agents. Difference between individuals is thus an absolute necessity for the perpetuation of a species. It is basic to all animal and plant life.

Third, the environment shapes varieties within species: the North African swallow is not identical to the Norwegian swallow; the Italian poplar differs from that of northern Europe; the Mediterranean human type is not the same as the Nordic type. The influence of the environment on modern man is perhaps less than it was, but it remains a determining factor on his psychology. Two identical twins, who do not differ genetically, are subjected to different external influences, especially if they are separated, and thus become two different beings. Only man moves from individuality to personality, because only man appropriates a cultural heritage from his social environment.

It is thus clear that the uniqueness of each person confers on him or her an individual dignity which is an additional reason, if any were necessary, for respecting that person; that this uniqueness should not make us forget that each person belongs to the great human family, which is also unique; that the concept of "racial purity" is totally meaningless, since all standardization leads to death. Thus, without losing its identity, a people must encourage the introduction of new genes from elsewhere. Finally, experience plays a paramount role in the mental and spiritual development of mankind.

In the melting pot of Western Europe, a human community with a number of common genetic traits has developed. The relative isolation of the provinces over a long period, inter-village marriages, diversity of climate and origins have favoured differences which modern means of communication are tending to obliterate.

These biological truths can easily be transposed by analogy to the cultural level.

The diversity of living, authentic cultures, which were even more plentiful in the last century, is a treasure of inestimable value. The disappearance of a culture is an irreparable loss, comparable to the extinction of an animal or plant species.

Each culture is characterized by its customs, its conception of the place of mankind in the universe, its beliefs. Each has its rituals, its modes of dress, each contributes to the incredible range of plastic arts or architecture, music, song, dance and all the other manifestations of mankind's creative imagination. Each has given humanity scientific discoveries or new technologies to ease the workload or relieve suffering.

These ideas, these dances, these techniques are, as in the field of biology, the fruit of multiple interactions between man and his surroundings. This deep-seated adaptation of cultures to their environment was striking before the intrusion of western technology; it takes a long time for such a symbiosis to develop.

Differences between cultures alone allow comparisons, the confrontation of ideas, ideologies and aspirations. They allow concepts to be enlarged and enriched. They allow discoveries and technologies to spread through the whole body of humanity, in a word they allow evolution through the choice of the highest values. In this way, by stages, the cultural evolution of humanity has progressed for thousands of years. No animal has profited like man from the experience of other groups; this is a unique feature of the history of the evolution of life.

Diversity of cultures is thus a priceless treasure which must be jealously preserved. If diversity is to persist, cultures must remain alive, that is, be capable of evolving through contact with others. Folklore is fossilized culture.

Most important of all, there should be harmonious co-existence between these diverse cultures, cohabitation accepted without discrimination, without reservations, without preconceived ideas. The most pernicious of the latter is the establishment of a cultural hierarchy in which one's own culture is of course high on the list. Just as there is no hierarchy between men and women—they are simply different—so there is no hierarchy between cultures: they are fortunately different.

We are today faced with two major risks: standardization and intolerance.

The standardization of cultures, as in biology, leads to the cessation of evolution, therefore to death. We already have a bitter foretaste of this.

Intolerance, more than indifference, secretes internecine conflicts and leads ultimately through incomprehension and the closing of minds and frontiers, to the same result as standardization: the end of evolution.

Wisdom lies in open-mindedness, in listening to others, in a spirit of total equality.

The French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944) magnificently encapsulated this mental attitude when he wrote, "If you are different from me, brother, far from harming me, you enrich me." ■

Jean Dausset

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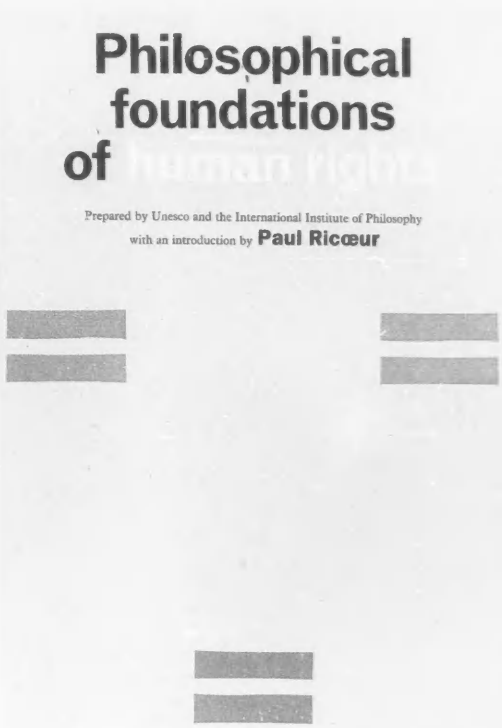

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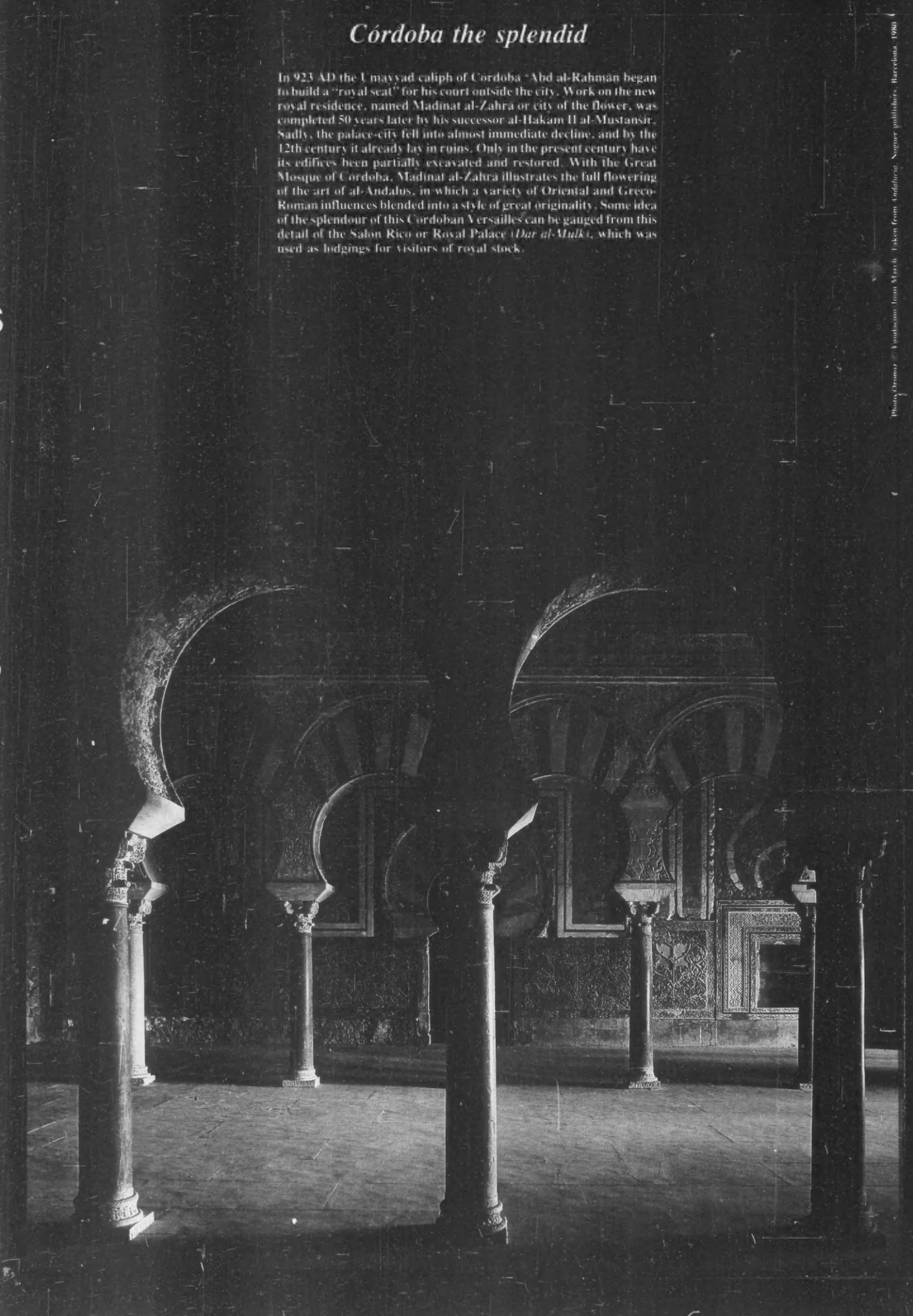
Córdoba the splendid

In 923 AD the Umayyad caliph of Córdoba 'Abd al-Rahmān began to build a "royal seat" for his court outside the city. Work on the new royal residence, named Madīnat al-Zahrā or city of the flower, was completed 50 years later by his successor al-Hakam II al-Mustansir. Sadly, the palace-city fell into almost immediate decline, and by the 12th century it already lay in ruins. Only in the present century have its edifices been partially excavated and restored. With the Great Mosque of Córdoba, Madīnat al-Zahrā illustrates the full flowering of the art of al-Andalus, in which a variety of Oriental and Greco-Roman influences blended into a style of great originality. Some idea of the splendour of this Cordoban Versailles can be gauged from this detail of the Salon Rico or Royal Palace (*Dar al-Mulk*), which was used as lodgings for visitors of royal stock.



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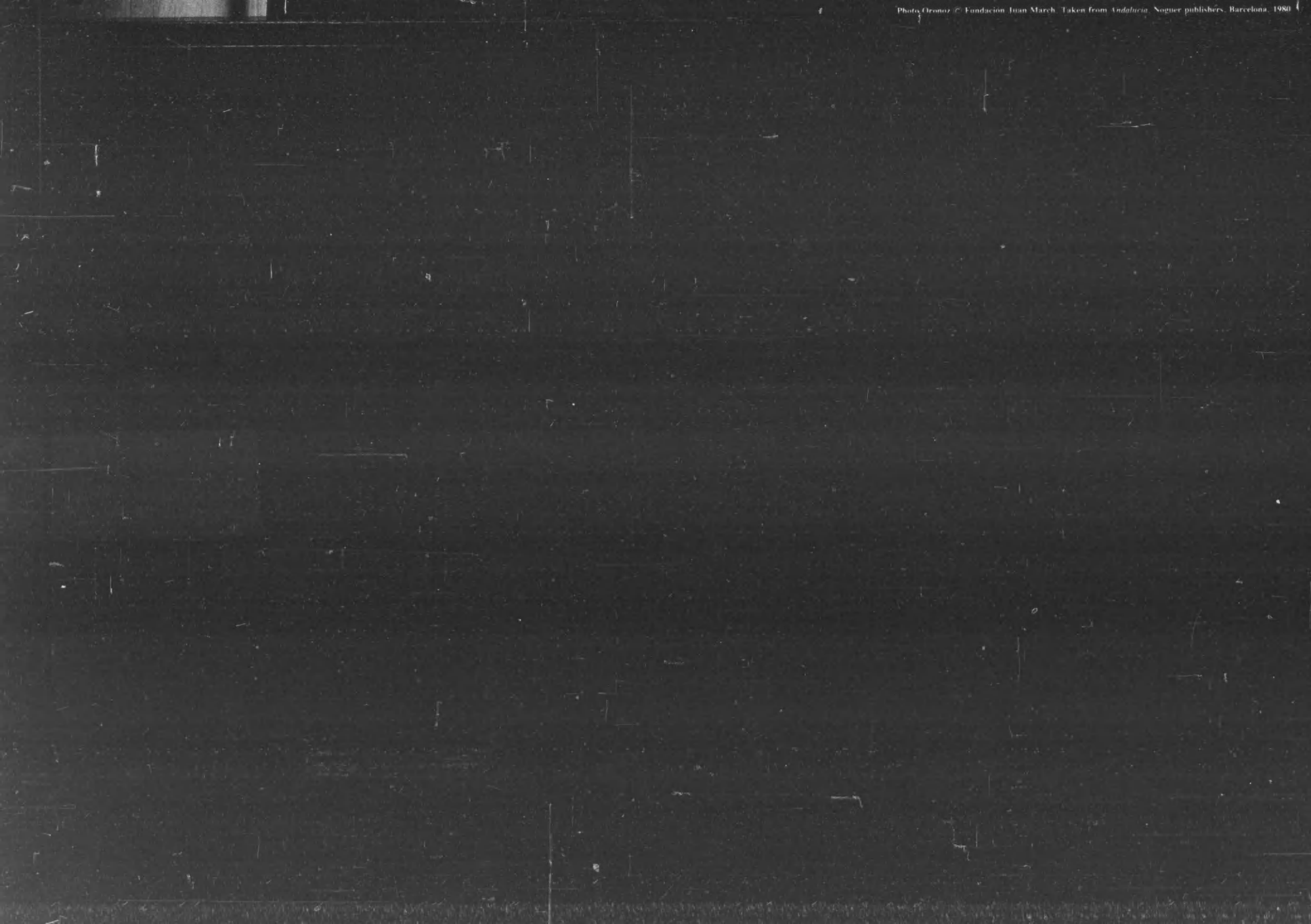

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